

Increasing TOEIC Students' Opportunities for Reading Native-Level English

— “News for TOEIC”: A Private Facebook Group —

TOEIC のためのニュース

プライベートフェイスブックグループによる英語教育の実践

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埼玉女子短期大学の国際コミュニケーション学科では、TOEIC 試験の受験者を対象とした授業「TOEIC」を開講している。TOEIC とは、国際コミュニケーション英語能力テストの略称であり、リスニングとリーディング試験の合計結果によってスコアが認定される。TOEIC では、ビジネス英語や日常会話など幅広い内容が出題されるため、多くの英語を母国語としない受講者は、広範囲の英文を読解できるリーディング能力が必要とされる。

著者は、受講者の主体的な英語学習を支援するため、Facebook グループ「News for TOEIC」を活用したオンライン英語教育を実践している。「News for TOEIC」では、身近なニュース記事などの情報を英語で配信、共有することによって、一般的なネイティブスピーカーが読み書きする英文に親しみ、「生きた英語」の読解力を身につけることを目標としている。

本稿では、「News for TOEIC」グループを中心とした英語教育の実践より、(1)英語学習のオンライン教育のプラットフォームとして、Facebook を選択した理由(2)グループのメンバー構成(3)掲載されるニューストピックスの選択理由と掲載基準の3点について記述する。

The Stimulus for the “News for TOEIC” Project: This past year (2012), students in my TOEIC class inquired about supplementary reading for gaining more experience in native-speaker-level reading. I was glad to hear this because students' scores on the Reading part of the TOEIC test have been significantly lower than Listening scores for

almost all students.

TOEIC: An Overview: First of all, though, what is TOEIC? TOEIC is an acronym for “Test of English for International Communication,” a test that originated in Japan and was developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) of Princeton, New Jersey, which also administers TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), and the GRE (Graduate Record Examinations). In its basic form, TOEIC measures a person’s listening and reading skills in business-oriented English for international workplace settings.

The TOEIC test comes in two forms: (1) the standard or “general public” test is officially known as the **TOEIC Secure Program (SP)** test, given frequently but at fixed times during the year: ten times a year, on an almost monthly basis; (2) the **TOEIC Institutional Program (IP)** test is offered through companies and schools at a time designated by them. It costs slightly less than TOEIC SP and, because of its convenience, schedule-wise, has become the more popular of the two test types.

The test is divided into a **Listening Section** of 100 multiple-choice questions and a **Reading Section** of 100 multiple-choice questions, and in all, takes two hours to complete.

Listening Section: (4 parts, 45 minutes): **Part 1** (10 questions): examinees are asked which one of four spoken statements best corresponds to a given photograph. **Part 2** (30 questions): examinees are asked which of three spoken responses is the best response to a spoken question or statement. **Part 3** (30 questions) has ten short conversations between two people, each followed by three questions, each with four answer choices. **Part 4** features ten short talks, again each followed by three questions, each with four answer choices.

Reading Section: (3 parts, 75 minutes): **Part 5** (40 questions) has sentences with a missing word or phrase and four answer choices that test mainly knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. **Part 6** (12 questions) is similar to Part 5 —missing words or phrases in sentences— but they are within various texts (letters, emails, passages, etc.) with four answer choices for each of three missing parts in each text.

Part 7 (58 questions) consist of medium-length reading passages, followed by questions, each with four answer choices. The reading passage section has two kinds of passages, **single passages** and **double passages**.

There are nine **single passages**, each with two to five multiple-choice questions about the content (28 questions). And finally, at the end of the marathon-like test comes the longest and most difficult part: five **double reading passages** (for example, an announcement or advertisement and a related email; a letter and a related form; an email inquiry and a response; an offer or application for a job and a written response, etc.). Each pair of passages is followed by four multiple-choice questions about the content or about the interrelationship between the two passages. For inexperienced students unaccustomed to reading at length, the single and double passages coming at the end of a two-hour-long test can be arduous and trying.

A perfect score for the TOEIC test's 200 questions is a difficult but achievable 990 points: an average of 4.95 points per question, giving 495 points for Listening and 495 points for Reading.

SAIJO's Objectives: Central to the efforts of Saitama Joshi Tanki Daigaku's (SAIJO's¹) TOEIC program was to help students in our popular Airline Course program achieve qualifying scores necessary for ground staff and cabin crew positions with various airlines. While all students are encouraged to take TOEIC classes in order to give them a better chance at getting a job in this "glacially" tough job market, Airline students do in fact make up the majority of class members, especially at the higher levels. While other types of work might have flexible, generalized, or ambiguous English language/TOEIC requirements, a 550–600 TOEIC score is necessary to even get one's foot in the door in the airline industry, so Airline students are highly motivated. The Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages notes, "A TOEIC score of at least 550 is required to apply for ground staff positions and at least 600 for flight attendants, with Japanese airlines. Foreign-owned airlines demand even higher scores (Kanda)."

Prioritizing: When I first started teaching TOEIC classes in 2009, we spent more time on the Listening Section than we do now. After a few practice tests and one in-school (TOEIC IP) test, it became clear that we needed to spend much more time practicing for the Reading Section, at some expense to Listening Section practice. Listening Section scores were generally "okay" to fairly good, but Reading Section scores were almost always significantly lower. This was generally true whether a student's total score was high or low.

Year/Month	Listen	Read	Total	Gap	Max Gap
2009.07 Avg.	196.8	125.5	322.3	-71.3	-190

	Listen	Read	Total	Gap
1	325	310	635	-15
2	360	225	585	-135
3	290	250	540	-40
4	310	230	540	-80
5	300	235	535	-65
6	290	235	525	-55
7	260	255	515	-5
8	295	220	515	-75
9	340	150	490	-190
10	290	195	485	-95
11	330	155	485	-175
12	250	220	470	-30
13	280	180	460	-100
14	285	175	460	-110
15	250	200	450	-50
16	260	190	450	-70
17	255	185	440	-70
18	230	195	425	-35
19	275	150	425	-125
20	255	155	410	-100

Deficits in Reading Section scores compared to Listening Section scores for the top twenty total scores (July 2009).

A look at the scores from our first TOEIC IP test in July 2009 —taken by 157 students— illustrates this (above tables). The average total score for all students, from poor to good, was 322.4. The average Listening Section Score was 196.8, but the average Reading Section score was significantly lower: 125.5.

But if we look at the individual scores of the top twenty students (above) —students who are or should be at least within “shouting distance” of the 550–600 point level, the pattern becomes clear. In this top–twenty group, Listening Section scores range from 230 to 360. Simply calculated, achieving a similar score in the Reading Section would give total scores between 460 and 720.

While the student with the highest total score has fairly well–balanced Listening and Reading scores (L: 325 + R: 310 = Total 635), a mere 15–point difference, the Reading scores of almost everyone else in this group is significantly lower. The Listening–Reading scores of the student with the second–highest overall score are (L: 360 + R: 225 = Total 585). Not at all bad, of course, but a matching Reading score would have given her a 720 total score, almost “Samsung level².” Her Listening/Reading gap was 135 points. The gap was even greater in the case of a student with a Listening score of 340, versus 150 in Reading, a huge 190–point gap; a third student had scores of (L: 330 + R: 155 = Total 485 (gap = 175).

We were unable to recover data for 2010, but now into our fourth year, the pattern remains pretty much the same (averages for all students taking the test, regardless of high or low scores):

Year/Month	Listen	Read	Total	Gap	Max Gap
2009.07 Avg.	196.8	125.5	322.3	-71.3	-190
2009.12 Avg.	217.7	131.6	349.3	-86.1	-210
2011.07 Avg.	204.0	137.2	341.2	-66.8	-230
2011.12 Avg.	217.1	135.8	352.9	-81.3	-185
2012.06 Avg.	211.4	123.3	334.7	-88.1	-260

Average gap (deficit) of Reading Section scores vs. Listening Section scores

We see from the above table that average total scores are generally trending better as years pass (granted, the sample is still very small). “Gap” refers the amount of deficit in Reading Section scores compared to Listening Section scores. In the case of average scores,

all averages show deficits, reflecting the fact that the great majority of students' Reading Section scores are lower than Listening Section scores. "Max Gap" is the largest score difference (deficit) found among all students' scores.

Next, we take a little closer look at the scores to distinguish, roughly, between smaller gaps/deficits and larger, more significant gaps/deficits. Students whose Reading Section scores are better than their Listen Section scores are very few in number, not more than two or three in any test. We arbitrarily defined a small or "close" Reading score deficit as being within 40 points or less of the Listening Section score. That is quite generous, actually, and it could easily be argued that a small/close difference should be no more than 30 or even 20 points. That would just add more scores to the "large" ("Not Close") side of the ledger, so we are actually being somewhat conservative here.

Furthermore, a 40-point deficit is surely much more significant when the total score is low, say, 265 (L: 180 + R: 85 = Total 265) than when the total score is high, say, 585 (L: 360 + R: 225 = Total 585), but we will gloss over that concern for now.

Year/Month	No. of Students	Reading Scores Better	Within 40 pts	Not Close (40+)	% Close	% Not Close
2009.07 Avg.	157	2	28	127	19.1%	80.1%
2009.12 Avg.	77	2	10	65	15.6%	84.4%
2011.07 Avg.	79	3	18	58	26.6%	73.4%
2011.12 Avg.	52	3	10	39	25.0%	75.0%
2012.06 Avg.	63	0	8	55	12.7%	87.3%

Relative portion of scores showing "large" deficits in Reading scores compared to Listening scores

The top twenty scores in the spring 2012 TOEIC IP showed similar imbalances between Listening and Reading scores, all showing Reading Section scores weaker than Listening Section scores. Only two Reading scores were within 20 points of the Listening scores.

Deficit	-20	-50	-60	-75	-80	-90	-95	-100	-105	-110	-120	-150	-175
No. of Students	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	3	3	1

Distribution of Listening deficit scores, top 20 scores (June 2012)

These deficits in Reading scores compared to Listening scores were obvious just glancing at the results of the official and in-class practice tests and motivated us try to improve the reading side of the ledger. The above figures just put what was already obvious into black and white.

What kind of reading/viewing material is on “News for TOEIC?”

Obviously, news is at the core of “News for TOEIC,” and I thought it necessary for students to come into contact with readings from the business world. But I also realized that a study diet of serious “business only” articles—close to what actually appears in TOEIC—would probably turn students off before long and be self-defeating. My thinking was that it was far more important for them to encounter native-level written English in a form that held at least a bit of interest for them, and to encounter that kind of English frequently, daily if possible.

A part of one's lifestyle and daily life. This way of thinking comes from a number of major life projects that I have undertaken in over the years, not just language. Through learning several languages in different ways, through taking up music, poetry, karaoke, rap, marathon running, and playing the guitar or ‘ukulele, or chanting in Hawai‘ian, among other activities, I have learned that ability and proficiency simply reflect what one normally does in daily life. If I run daily, I become a runner and if I intensify it intelligently, I can become a competitive runner. If my running becomes irregular, my competence as a runner suffers accordingly. The same holds true for competence in foreign languages, playing the piano, or singing karaoke. Fitness, health, and maintaining a reasonable body-weight work the same way too: one might be able to drop 10 kg. (22 lbs.) in a week or so on a crash-diet, but does that reflect true healthiness? The true state of

your weight, BMI, health, and fitness really depend on what you regularly do, day in and day out — your lifestyle.

Facebook as a News Site: Facebook, if you think about it, is ideally suited for a site like “News for TOEIC.” It is itself, after all, a kind of news site, at the personal, individual level, where people let their friends know what they are thinking, what they have been doing, share photos, articles and videos that they like on a fairly public network. And all this “news” from my friends, students, and associates show up on what is called, not surprisingly, my “News Feed” page.

Organizations post news and share information about their doings, schedules, events, and plans: for the two volunteer disaster-relief organizations that I have worked with in Japan’s Tōhoku region, Facebook is the primary means of disseminating information, both through private organization/member sites and semi-public pages shared among “Friends.” And many commercial organizations —companies, schools, shops, and clubs— use Facebook sites to share information and keep their members and customers close to them; of course, the postings also serve as PR and advertisements. Postings from commercial organizations such as All Nippon Airways (ANA), Japan Airlines (JAL), Kaspersky Labs, Peet’s Coffee and Tea, and Amazon Japan regularly appear on my “News Feed” page, as do postings from Ryūgaku Jōhōkan (留学情報館/Study–Abroad Information Site) and Ganbappe-shi Rikuzen–Takata (がんぱっべし陸前高田/Hang in There, Rikuzen–Takata, (one of the more badly earthquake–tsunami–damaged cities in Iwate Prefecture)).

Who are members of the “News for TOEIC” Group?

The “News for TOEIC” site was originally set up for students in my 2012 TOEIC classes, TOEIC 500 (Spring) and TOEIC 600 (Fall), with 500 and 600 indicating score objectives. These scores are at or near the (minimum) scores generally needed to be considered for employment as cabin crew (600) or ground staff (550) for airline-related employment, or at least close enough to be within striking distance in the near future (Kanda).

I had been working with the Airline/Hospitality group students and their advisor, Professor Kayo Morikawa (formerly with All Nippon Airways (ANA)), and there, it first occurred to me how I might use Facebook for my TOEIC students. Two first-year Korean students had set up a private Facebook group for Airline students, "SAIJO Airline 'SAL 12'," which gave me the idea that a similar, private group could be set up for TOEIC students. This would allow me to post articles and topics that I thought might be relevant or useful in getting students to read more native-level English, both of a business nature and of a more casual nature.

Most of these students, still fresh out of high school, are generally in the 300-plus-or-minus range when they start³, but have little or no experience in the real, adult world — business-related or not. I saw no reason to limit membership in the "News for TOEIC" group to just my own students and welcomed students from both higher- and lower-level classes if they wanted to expose and challenge themselves to more "real" English. As a matter of fact, the first member I invited was not one of my own TOEIC class students. She was in my English Conversation class and was in the Airline group as well, and she was nearby in the school library when I was taking the first online steps to create the "News for TOEIC" site on Facebook. She indicated interest, so I invited her then and there as the first member.

Other students of mine in the library wandered by, and since we were already in contact (as "Friends") on Facebook, I explained to them what I had in mind and invited them too, and soon a small group was developing within the first few hours. (A "Friend" request on Facebook is a request to establish contact through Facebook. Items (comments, website links, photos, videos) one posts on Facebook are viewable by those "Friends.")

Over the next several weeks, I asked several more students, especially students in the various TOEIC classes, if they would be interested in joining, and the numbers climbed steadily, reaching 20, 30, 40, 50, and beyond, before leveling off somewhat. At this writing, there are 79 members of the group, including me, with several more potential members whom I have not had a chance to contact, explain the group and the site, and invite.

Invitation Policy: Since "News for TOEIC" is a closed, private Facebook group, membership is by invitation only, and this writer, as the creator and administrator of the

site and group, must issue the invitations. Of course, in order to participate in Facebook activities in any way, publicly or privately, a person must first sign up for Facebook. Once a person is a Facebook member, any member can send a “Friend” request to any other member, anywhere in the world. In order to send an invitation to join a private group like “News for TOEIC,” the site administrator must have a Facebook “Friend” relationship with the potential member, since invitations, like any other Facebook communication is through Facebook itself. Many people, concerned about personal information and privacy⁴, do not care to sign up for Facebook. In that case, there is no way to invite them to join “News for TOEIC.”

Using “power” judiciously. Since I am a teacher at the college, however, and in a position of “power,” especially in a hierarchical society like Japan, I make it a policy not to invite my own students. I myself might not intend to exercise any kind of “power” over them, but a student receiving a “Friend” request from me might feel uncomfortable. For example, unbeknownst to me, a student might feel an incompatibility with me or even outright dislike me, even though she might never show it. She might want to refuse my request but worry that refusing it might affect her grade or the classroom relationship, so she might go ahead and reluctantly accept my request. On the off chance that this could be the situation, I send out “Friend” requests to personal friends and associates—and to students who have graduated—but never to students currently attending the college.

Instead, I tell them that if they want to be my Facebook “Friend” or join “News for TOEIC,” **they** should send me a “Friend” request, which I will accept. That avoids any concerns of “power harassment.” Once they send me a “Friend” request, I can send them an invitation to become a member of the “News for TOEIC” group. Even then, they can still decide not to join the group after all and decline or not respond to the invitation.

SAIJO Graduates as Members. Since Saitama Women’s Junior College first opened in 1989, I have been deeply involved in the study-abroad (留学) program, both as a regular committee member and as the chairman of the committee that runs our various programs. Through Facebook, I have received a number of “Friend” requests from SAIJO graduates, but especially from those who have participated in our study-abroad programs in various countries⁵. Over these twenty-plus years, this has come to be a rather large body of

graduates who have a continued interest in developing or keeping up their English skills. Others even actively use English at work or in travel. I accept their "Friend" requests and send them invitations to join "News for TOEIC."

The response has been very good. Some of them still have very active contact with English because of work or the fact that they study or even reside overseas. It is gratifying to see that so many of them, even if they have no immediate need to use English in daily life, are still eager to stay in contact with native-level English through selected material appearing on "News for TOEIC." In fact, graduates are the most active group, in terms of viewing the material, clicking the "Like" button if they enjoyed a particular item, and even making comments or their own contributions to the site. For me, it is the most contact I have ever had with graduates⁶. Currently, we have 24 SAIJO graduates among the 79 "News for TOEIC" members overall, with three in the USA (including Hawai'i), three in Australia, one in New Zealand, and one in Macau. One—a frequent contributor to "News for TOEIC"—is still on the road, having spent this entire year (2012) on a one-woman, around-the-world backpacking journey. Even for me, her posts make for fascinating reading, and she is an inspiration to me and the students who come after her.

Faculty and Staff. Some faculty and staff—including three from one of our study-abroad destinations—have become "News for TOEIC" members and generally follow the postings. I appreciate their presence because they serve as monitors and advisors who can tell me if they think a certain comment or posting is inappropriate or inadvisable.

The General Community. I have invited four people from the general community to join the "News for TOEIC" group. Three of them are connected with my volunteer work with the Save Minami Sôma Project, which makes twice a month deliveries of food and water to residents of that city who still live in temporary housing (仮設住宅). One of these members is a former resident of Minami Sôma who evacuated with her family to Saitama after the 3.11 earthquake and tsunami that destroyed wide areas of the city. She is natively fluent in both English and Japanese. Another is a young American teacher who teaches in Minami Sôma schools for the city's Board of Education. She came to Minami Sôma after the disaster, well aware of the difficult and inconvenient situation she was walking into, almost in the shadow of the problem nuclear reactors a short distance away.

The third outside member was a teammate and fellow driver on a food-and-water delivery that I participated in, and is an official with Immigration at Tokyo International Airport at Narita.

The fourth outside member is an American who lives in Germany: we were in the same study-abroad group for a year in (then West) Germany, and sometimes traveled together in the same group of friends. Recently, she helped support a traveling SAIJO graduate (and “News for TOEIC” member) who was traveling through Germany. The “News for TOEIC” network has been useful far beyond TOEIC itself.

There is actually a fifth outside member, a local high school student who participated in our 2012 Open Campus series and who hopes to join our Airline course as a college student.

Family Members: I have also invited members of my own family to join “News for TOEIC.” One is a citizen of Iceland who has spent almost his entire life in Seattle. A number of our “Seattle” students there have met him, and he recently hosted our “world-traveler” SAIJO graduate for a few days. Another is a Japanese relative in Numazu who is fluent in English. The third is my 90-year-old aunt —my father’s younger sister— who is an enthusiastic reader of “News for TOEIC” material and an occasional contributor.

Conditions for Outside Members: Members who are not directly involved in the SAIJO community must meet a few requirements: they should be fluent in English or close to it. More importantly, in case they post or make comments on the “News for TOEIC” site, they must keep their language clean. There has been a growing tendency over the past several years in America to casually use expletives —so called “dirty words” and offensive language— on social media sites without much thought. Such expressions are more offensive than the occasional “hell” or “damn” that sometimes appear in even general media (the abbreviated expression “WTF” one of the more offensive ones now commonly used on Facebook). For this reason, I have refrained from inviting certain friends and family I would otherwise be delighted to have in the group, because they tend to let slip with an expletive in a moment of shock or anger. Students will encounter such expressions —or already have— through their native-speaker friends overseas sooner or later, but I prefer that they not see or learn such expressions on the “News for TOEIC” site. All too often, as

we sometimes see on TV, Japanese will use some rather shocking English expressions in public (or on T-shirts) without fully understanding their negative impact. I do not need my students saying they learned that kind of language from me, their English teacher.

Working with Facebook

Posting: Without going too deeply into the ins and outs of what is called “posting,” it might be easy to understand one’s own “postings” as a kind of mini-publishing of one’s own comments, thoughts, reactions, photos, videos, news articles from online sources, and other items of interest via one’s Facebook (FB) site. One can make such entries in the posting box at the top of the Facebook “News Feed” page or one’s own personal page, where it says “What’s on your mind?” It looks something like this:

What’s on your mind?	
Friends	Post

One can type a comment into the posting box on the page and click the dark blue “Post” button, and the comment will appear for all one’s “Friends” to see and post their own comments and reactions to it. This is what I do when I post my own opinions, thoughts, and observations on “News for TOEIC.”

URL links from online sources: News Articles and Stories. More often, though, I scan various online news sites for news that I think is relevant and/or interesting to students. Among my most common sources are **Japan Today**, a strictly online site with news and articles of interest in several areas; **The Japan Times Online**; and **Google News** (USA edition). I also sometimes come across articles of interest in the paper edition of the Japan Times and then locate the same article on The Japan Times Online site for posting. Japan Today is especially useful because of the way it categorizes into interesting and

easily searchable areas. News sources, though, might be anything available on the internet.

The Japanese English language online sources are useful because they include news that is literally close to home, about things that Japanese students are likely to hear about from Japanese sources as well: then they can use what they have seen or heard from Japanese media and use that background and context to try to read "News for TOEIC" articles in English without resorting to a dictionary. **Using such background knowledge from other sources to GUESS at the probable meaning of English passages is an extremely important skill to develop in order to read quickly and smoothly.**

Once I locate an interesting article, I copy and paste its URL into the Facebook posting box. Facebook then converts the URL into the article title, the story's lead sentence or two, and usually includes a "thumbnail" photo from the article or the site's logo. Usually, the URL itself is embedded within the title of the article that appears, and the URL—in any case, often some hard-to-decipher "gobbledygook" like ([http://thisishardtoread_1243%\\$&^&#](http://thisishardtoread_1243%$&^&#))—can usually be deleted.

Images: Videos. Interesting videos, usually from YouTube, can be posted in the same way, simply by copying and directly pasting the video clip's URL into the regular FB posting box. Videos (usually YouTube but other sources as well) are often embedded within written news stories. As with written articles, the URL is converted to the title and a small, expandable video window appears with a still scene from the video.

Images: Personal Videos, Photos, Photo Albums: For my own photos, I go to the "Add Photo/Video" link near the top of the page to get the window, click the "Upload Photos/Video" or "Create Photo Album," search for the photo/video on my computer, and upload it to Facebook for others to see and comment upon.

Topic Selection

One way to give students more opportunities to read native-speaker- or high-level English is to simply feed them—inundate them—with more and more TOEIC materials. Up to a point, this would be effective, obviously, but from my own experience with German

and other languages, I knew it could also be quite onerous, perhaps even counterproductive, simply a “more is better” approach, which can also leave a negative aftertaste with regard to English.

If a person is in a work situation, where there is really no choice but to deal with written communications from overseas, for example, or internet sites in English, one will soldier on for the sake of continued employment and the paycheck. Students who are in a study-abroad situation also have fewer chances to escape dealing with English as it is one medium in which classes are conducted, and in a worst case scenario, failure to perform adequately can result in the loss of visa. Ability to deal with English, written or otherwise, is indispensable in daily life in an English-speaking country.

Such “no-choice” situations are by no means bad, for if “necessity is the mother of invention,” they focus the mind wonderfully and are in fact largely what makes study-abroad so effective. You might sweat blood and tears (I know I did) and cry yourself to sleep at night, but you will also almost certainly learn English, both spoken and written. Like it or not, it is almost impossible not to. Such situations work because the consequences of not working through them have a very real impact on one's life.

Maki, one of the students in my advisory group a few years ago, told me outright that she disliked studying English (and did so again, as recently as November 2012 (Facebook, personal communication) and generally avoided taking English classes if possible, but at the same time was determined to study in the United States in order to prepare herself for working in her family's architectural firm. She did go to the U.S. and studied—and graduated—from the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising, and is now in her third year there in the Los Angeles area, thriving and fluent in English. (But she still dislikes studying English.)

Students in Japan, however, are not in such a no-choice situation. At worst, poor performance or refusal to perform would result in a lower score or a lower grade or the loss of academic credits/units, but it would be no immediate threat to one's living or well-being. Students have more leeway to just avoid or put aside dealing with yet more written English. That is, they still have some choices.

What I wanted for my students, TOEIC or otherwise, was to entice them to read

English more casually, without academic pressure (my German professor's advice), and, above all, to read in English frequently and, if possible, habitually. This all came out of my own experience when I struggled terribly with heavy and difficult German literature in college.

When my professor asked me what the problem was, I told him that I was having to look up almost every other word, and it was taking me an hour to read just a few pages, never mind entire novels, and that I could not keep up with the classes. He replied, only half joking, that the real problem was my dictionary and that I should throw it away. Not really, of course, but his point was that the dictionary was getting in the way, that it made me focus on the words so much that I lost sight of the story, "can't see the forest for the trees," as the saying goes. "Use your imagination," he said. "Guess at the meanings from the drift and context of the story."

Moreover, he said that I should practice reading with this softer, less intense focus by reading casually —German newspapers, magazines, even gossip and entertainment magazines or —dare I say it? —even comic books. It would probably free me, he thought, from thinking that I had to understand every word, sentence, and nuance, and might even start enjoying it a little. "And if you're not successful at guessing at the meaning, just let it go and move on," he said. "The world is not going to end if you don't understand, or misunderstand, the meaning of a few words here and there. You will be surprised, but your guesses will be reasonably accurate more often than you would imagine. And you will find that the same method of reading usually works even for serious literature too."

I tried his advice, and after a while, found that I was reading more and more, more frequently and faster, and gradually became able to keep up with the reading assignments in class. I certainly did not understand everything but was able to get the drift of the story and began actually enjoy them. All the while, both in America and during my year at a German university, I continued reading gossip and scandal tabloids, comics, and Jewish humor on the side while studying literature and history at college. The professor's advice has worked for every other language I have used since then, both written and unwritten, including Japanese, where I still guess at kanji all the time, asking myself "What makes sense here in this context or situation?" and letting it go at that. I really got into the habit

of reading Japanese for extended periods of time through Adachi Mitsuru's famous "Touch" (manga) series, followed by "Miyuki," and "Nine." Even now, I rarely use a dictionary.

Thus, I was hoping that at least some of my students would develop the habit of reading more frequently in English if the going was not so difficult and dry, if it was more interesting, even fun. I hoped that, even subconsciously, they would learn to use context from what they already knew to interpret what they were reading, accurately or not, and to get involved in the stories and want to know what happened next, rather than worrying so much about every word.

I hoped that students' curiosity would be piqued by articles from sports, show business, and human interest stories —what I describe as being a "morning wide" news variety show approach seen on morning TV in Japan. "Morning wide" shows feature developing news of the day from around the world and from Japanese politics, business, and crime, which are softened by news from sports, entertainment, weather, gossip and scandal, as well as segments on topics including fashion, shopping, health, interesting foods, and animal stories. If students would take a look, even at just the title or lead line, of a story from the airline or hotel industries and other business-related areas once in a while, that would be even better, but above all, if they would just read more frequently, progress would be made. This more "entertaining" reading would be the platform where I could introduce a few short "messages from our sponsor": business-related readings.

Brevity: Again, I did not want students to get bogged down in lengthy news articles, so in addition to selecting most of the articles for "entertainment value," I selected for brevity, ideally a few paragraphs or less, that they could skim through in two or three minutes. Only very occasionally do I include longer stories, and usually, only if the stories are of great interest. At some point, of course, students will need to be able to read at greater length and more deeply, but that is a longer-term project, a year or more down the line. Right now, if I may use an example from marathoning, they are still in the first week of training, and most of them should be building their strength, stamina, and endurance at shorter distances, in small steps, learning to walk for distance before running for distance. At this point, it is more important to train regularly and frequently, in short distances, than to run long, long distances.

Readership: Although “News for TOEIC” has approximately 80 members, clearly not everyone reads the material and not all the time. Part of the challenge for me, as for any editor, is to try to keep the selection of material interesting so that they will come back again and again.

“Seen by ...” link: An interesting feature of private Facebook sites like “News for TOEIC” is that entries/postings have a “Seen by ...” link that shows how many members have taken a look at the particular posting and who they are, in addition to the “Like” button by which those who like it can indicate their favorable response. When I first started checking the site, it was somewhat disappointing: no “Seen by....” link indicates that no one has bothered to take a look. But as I started scrolling down the page and back in time, I would see that 5, 9, 16, and 20 people are listed in the “Seen by ...” list. As I go back over a week, the numbers climb into the 30s or 40s, and over a few weeks, the numbers go into the 50s or even 60s, meaning that for most postings, some 60–75% of the members have at least taken a quick look at it.

Whether they actually read the entire article or not is another story, but even if they decided after a glance the article was not interesting enough to read further, they at least looked the title and the lead-in line or so, enough to have made that decision. Most media organizations would be delighted with such viewer ratings. It was most gratifying, then, when one of my TOEIC students told me that she had first learned about the birth of a baby panda (which later died) at Ueno Zoo on “News for TOEIC” before seeing it on Japanese TV⁷.

“News for TOEIC” Posts

Following are a couple of examples of links to some actual news articles I have posted on “News for TOEIC” in late 2012, with the article title serving as a clickable link:

Hawaiian Airlines begins Honolulu–Sapporo flights

www.japantoday.com Hawaiian Airlines has launched flights between Honolulu and Sapporo. Hawaiian’s Honolulu–Sapporo....

Girls' Generation posters for new album released in Japan

www.japantoday.com Popular all-girl South Korean group Girls' Generation will release their second album in Japan on Nov 28....

The Hawai'an Airlines article is a straight business article, selected (1) for its relative brevity, a few short paragraphs roughly the length of some TOEIC reading passages and not so long that students suffer wading through it, (2) sweetened by the fact that it has something to do with romantic and exotic Hawai'i, and (3) brought close to home in that it is airline-related, close to the industry that many of the students in the class hope to work in.

The Girls' Generation article was chosen because it capitalizes on the fact that the Korean song-and-dance group is popular in Japan and the posters feature the Korean singers dressed in flight attendant uniforms, representing the industry the students want to be a part of. (For more examples of actual "News for TOEIC" posts, see the Appendix (site logo, photo, and video thumbnails generally not included).

Effectiveness

Will the "News for TOEIC" approach work? It is still much too early to tell. With this approach or without it, or with some other approach, it is a long-term project. For those taking TOEIC for the first time or who have only taken practice tests, the actual TOEIC can come as a shock and it can be quite exhausting. It is, in fact, kind of a marathon session. I tell my students to take the first TOEIC test or two as "practice or reconnaissance runs," in order to get the "lay of the land" (in Japanese, 下見 (shitami)), to see what they are in for. In actual marathoning, even experienced runners need to get a marathon or two under their belts, so that they can understand, physically and mentally, what kind of beast this event is and how best to prepare for it.

I tell my students to be realistic and expect good results no earlier than the second or third test, just as in marathoning, or even later, perhaps years later. (If good results were

easy to achieve on the first or second attempt, the nation would be full of people with high TOEIC scores. It is not.)

The most successful TOEIC student in the college's history —almost frighteningly so— is a good example, and the story is instructive: that student is **Yuki Ichikawa**, from right in our local town of Hidaka City in Saitama Prefecture. She graduated several years ago (2003) and has achieved a TOEIC score of 945 out of a possible 990. (I tell my students, openly and only half in jest, that even as a native-speaker, I would be reluctant to take the TOEIC test with Yuki, because the slightest inattention or loss of focus on my part would result in my getting the lower score).

Yuki, however, did not just take the test and walk out with such a superb score right off the bat. It was the result of years of effort —of sorts. She started taking the TOEIC test in high school, at about age 15. She writes:

I don't really remember . . . the first time I took TOEIC, but . . . I was 15 (1997) or so. At that time, I didn't even know what TOEIC was for, but I took it anyway because I thought it was cool. Lol... (personal Facebook communication)

By the time she graduated from high school, she had achieved a score of 675 . In her first year at SAIJO, she participated in our six-month program at our study-abroad affiliate, Edmonds Community College (EdCC) in Lynnwood, Washington, a suburb of Seattle. There, she qualified immediately to take regular college courses (that is, with and in direct competition with American students) and raised her score to 775 (late 2000 – early 2001).

After completing her second year at SAIJO (2001–2002) and graduating (3/2002), she went back to EdCC as a regular student to study for a degree in International Business. At that point (sometime in 2003), after studying in English and competing with native speakers for a year, she broke through to the highest levels with a score of 905 (2003), with a perfect score in the Listening section. Upon her return to Japan, she worked at the English language school GEOS, scoring 925 in 2004, again with a perfect Listening score.

I often use climbing Mt. Fuji as an analogy for language-learning: to go from stations at the lower levels (stations 1–2–3–4), the slope is relatively easy and progress is fast. By the 4th or 5th station, it is starting to get rather taxing; by the 6th station, your legs are getting harder to move and your lungs are straining in the thinner air. This is where the students are in TOEIC, but now I am asking them to go to the 7th or even the 8th stations, where the air is thinner still and the slope steeper yet. It is going to take time.

Yuki has passed the 9th station, headed for the summit, and every step (point) toward the summit (990) becomes excruciatingly difficult. “Once you go over 900,” she says, “it’s so hard to maintain your score (personal communication).”

Busy with work at SAIJO for several years, she did not take TOEIC again until 2011 but scored 945 (Listening score dropped slightly). However, most of those SAIJO years were spent coordinating the college’s study-abroad program from the office side, where communicating with our overseas affiliates through various media and preparing orientation materials (including English lessons) were part of her daily work, so her contact with English continued, with a lot at stake that depended on the accuracy and speed of her English language skills.

What is interesting about all this is how Yuki has studied for TOEIC: basically, **she has not.**

Yuki writes: “I never ‘studied’ English for TOEIC, but I was always listening to English. I don’t want to force myself to study English because it will just make me tired (personal communication).”

My feelings exactly. But during all that time, English, both spoken and written, were usually a part of her daily life, not so much a special focus or target: it was just something she did. As I said earlier, TOEIC —or almost any performance score— simply reflects what one regularly does day in and day out.

Instead of studying, Yuki continues, “I tried to watch as many American TV series as possible, like ‘Ugly Betty,’ ‘Lost,’ and so on.” “. . . [W]hen I watch American TV series, I watch it with English captions.” That will improve your reading speed, because captions do not stay on the screen very long. I do that too, in Japanese, while watching Japanese TV, and used to do it while singing Japanese karaoke songs, but unfortunately, have not

achieved an equivalent level of skill.

Notice particularly, that Yuki, as I have suggested for my “News for TOEIC” site, does not so much study English as just use it, and that even an exceptional learner of English as Yuki feels, as I do, that too much direct study “will just make me tired.” The TV shows she watches are commonly watched dramas and comedy, standard family leisure entertainment.

I myself, after overcoming my problems with learning German, have always used a similar style of language-learning, centering on frequency. In Honolulu, once I had decided to come to Japan, I watched only Japanese TV (KIKU TV) and listened only to only Japanese radio stations (KZOO and KOHO) for two years, so that I would become accustomed to the speed and rhythms of Japanese spoken by native speakers. TV broadcasts had English subtitles (*jimaku*) for the local audience but after a while, I covered the lower part of the screen where the subtitles were shown in order to make my mind process the Japanese and figure things out as much as possible from the context and flow and what best made sense.

When I got to Japan, my first two purchases were a used radio and a used TV from a second-hand shop. After that, I went out and bought food, a lower priority. To this day, my TV or radio is always on at home as long as I am awake, and from that, I get a lot of my information about what is going on around me, both serious and frivolous. Like Yuki, I am always reading the subtitles and pick up new vocabulary and expressions almost daily. Japanese being so deep and complex, it is a never-ending challenge, but that is one of the main reasons I came to Japan in the first place. Like Yuki, on the one hand, I have never really studied Japanese, but on the other hand, I am **always** learning Japanese, every waking movement. It is just one of the main things I do in life.

Yuki Ichikawa’s outstanding success in TOEIC is no overnight story. By the time she achieved her 945 score, she had been at it for 14 years, little by little. She never studies for TOEIC, but English is constantly a part of her life.

Yuki Ichikawa is of course a member of “News for TOEIC” and posts contributions to it as well.

Getting into Facebook in the First Place

I was not an early adopter of Facebook social networking due to concerns about privacy and was never in any hurry to jump on the bandwagon, although it was being actively used by hundreds of millions of people around the world⁸. Despite these huge user numbers, many people I know are still reluctant. At the same time, I had been quite interested in how Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites were being used to facilitate the Arab Spring uprisings that had broken out in the Arab world, beginning with Tunisia and Algeria in mid–December 2010 and I was feeling a need to get some hands–on experience in how such social media actually worked. Still, those events were half a world away and not an urgent concern to me.

That all changed abruptly on March 11, 2011, when the Great East Japan Earthquake and resulting tsunami devastated the Pacific Coast of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima prefectures. The Kantô area, where Saitama Women's Junior College is located, was strongly shaken, as was neighboring Tôkyô to the south, but actual damage was not significant. However, many of our students come from the three stricken prefectures and not a few of them from coastal areas. One student, from Onahama, in Iwaki City, Fukushima, was studying at Edmonds Community College in Lynnwood, Washington, north of Seattle, so I was concerned about her family and whether she had been able to contact them. Her father, who is involved in road and seawall construction, was in fact working 25 kms. to the northeast, in Hisanohama, right on the coast, at the fateful time

I asked Yuki Ichikawa —a SAIJO graduate who pretty much ran our study–abroad programs in the office— whether she had heard anything from that student and how best to keep in touch with her under these emergency circumstances. Yuki told me that our email was not reliable for emergency communication, that students overseas might or might not check their college email (xxxx@saijo.ac.jp), but that they would check their Facebook sites all the time to share information, see what their friends were up to, and to see if anyone had “liked” their posts or commented on them, so it was by far the most reliable means of communication. Hearing that, I signed up for Facebook immediately and finally got on the bandwagon.

Seeing how Facebook works in an organization. Already on March 11, once I had grasped the enormity of the disaster, I resolved to help in clean-up, relief, and recovery operations somewhere on the Tōhoku Pacific Coast, where I had often traveled on foot during my early years in Japan, as soon as it became feasible. I chose to go with Peace Boat, an organization that had disaster-relief experience and, with its highly internationalized Japanese staff, had no problem dealing with foreigners.

It turned out that Facebook was one of Peace Boat's main means of disseminating information about schedules, meeting, recruiting, preparations for disaster-relief work (what to expect, what to bring), fund-raising events, and much more. After we finished our work in Miyagi Prefecture's Ishinomaki City, one of the hardest hit areas, we kept in touch with our disaster-relief comrades and continued to receive updates and appeals for volunteer work in Tōhoku through Facebook. Fellow Peace Boat Volunteers made up the bulk of my Facebook friends at the time, and I began to understand how Facebook helped to form and keep personal networks intact and facilitate the dissemination of information.

After Golden Week, the number of volunteer workers throughout Tōhoku plummeted (Kuroiwa), with people having to get back to their regular jobs. Yet, many of us were not willing to forget about Tōhoku despite the passage of time, time that supposedly heals wounds but can lead to forgetting. One problem with the Peace Boat operation was that it wanted volunteers to stay in Ishinomaki for a week, even two weeks if possible. That kind of time commitment was just too difficult for most people, but we still wanted to help. I spent free days here and there, helping out at Peace Boat headquarters in Takadanobaba (Shinjuku Ward, Tōkyō), soliciting donations at Hibiya Park, and attending fund-raising dinners and parties sponsored by Peace Boat.

It was through the Facebook network of "Friends" that I had become a part of during Peace Boat volunteer work that gave me my next opportunity to help out in Tōhoku. John McCullough, one of my Peace Boat team members in Ishinomaki, had begun volunteering with another organization, the Save Minamisōma Project⁹ (SMP) and sent out a call through his Facebook page for volunteers to join him in a relief food run to Minami Sōma in Fukushima Prefecture in mid-April 2012. Reading up on the sponsoring organization, The Save Minamisoma Project (via their Facebook site, of course), I learned that they made

deliveries of food and water to the city approximately every other week, and that the time involved was approximately 24 hours during weekends (Friday night to Saturday night or Saturday night to Sunday night). This was something I could manage if I had a relatively open weekend and did not have too much preparation or catch-up work to do for my college classes. Joining up was simply a matter of writing a comment to John's call for volunteers that I was available and would like to participate.

So far, I have been able to participate in only one delivery run to Minami Sôma but am scheduled to go again on December 22–23, 2012, as the school year winds down, giving me more free time. As with Peace Boat, the principal means of communication and information dissemination is via Facebook, and I have made a number of friends in and from Minami Sôma who are fairly regular Facebook correspondents —some of whom I have yet to meet in person. Three are “News for TOEIC” members.

Beyond TOEIC: Facebook's Importance for the College

Facebook's “Message” function for Emergency Contact. Another reason, Facebook works well for keeping in touch with students is its “Message” function, which is basically for non-public messages that one does not want broadcast all over regular, networked Facebook pages. We said earlier that students, whether overseas or here in Japan, might or might not be checking their SAIJO mail (xxxx@saijo.ac.jp). In fact, although they were given accounts during orientation week and told that this mail address would be a major means of communicating important information to them, many have forgotten all about it and never use it¹⁰. Instead, they use their mobile-/smartphone address, or Google Mail or other online mail service address, which we sometimes do not have because of privacy concerns. Unfortunately, the college's mail service is a less than perfect means for relaying important or emergency information.

However, the Facebook “Message” function is linked not only to their Facebook page but also to whatever mail address they commonly use to keep in touch with friends, the address they have registered on Facebook (it also usually serves as their “user name” when

they log in to Facebook). Usually, this is for their mobile-/smartphone, because it has become as essential as oxygen to them. There are many students I have sent non-public Facebook messages to, without knowing or even caring what their mail addresses were. Basically, these are private/non-public messages in the same way regular mail messages between phones or between computers and phones are. Often, I save a step or two by sending regular messages via Facebook “Message” instead of going to my Google Mail. And some students set up their phones to block messages from computers in order to block spam mail, but Facebook “Message” gets around that. If students are studying overseas and are on Facebook, I know that they are never without their phones, so my Facebook “Message” will reach definitely reach them, even if I have no idea where they are.

Trial run but real. When the ceiling of the Sasago Tunnel on the Chûô Expressway collapsed on Sunday morning, December 2, 2012, (killing nine people, as it turned out), I knew that the mother of one of our students might be on her way home from the college via that route at that time. I sent a message to the student via Facebook “Message” (I do not know any of her mail addresses) asking if her mother was safe, and got a reply back within minutes that she had been on her way home at the time of the collapse but was going in the opposite direction and had already branched off toward her hometown and was safe. The mother was grateful that I had been on top of the situation and said she would rest a little easier while her daughter was overseas because of that. The usefulness of Facebook for situations like this cannot be questioned, and **Facebook accounts need to made mandatory for our students going overseas.**

In Conclusion

First-year college students fresh out of high school have little experience with the heavy and difficult reading of business English, which is the stuff of TOEIC. They lack the endurance to read passage after passage of English for long periods of time in topic areas that are totally unfamiliar to them. (Even native English speakers would find it tough going if they suddenly had to read real estate, tax, financial, or technical documents in

fields in which they had little experience or interest. Moreover, it is well known that many young Japanese do not read books, novels, or even newspapers very much any more, even in their own native language. If anything, many college-age students are likely to read manga and maybe trendy magazines.

Through part-time jobs and internships, it is also necessary for them to gain experience in the real world: dictionary definitions of terms like “contract,” “shareholders’ interests,” “minutes and agenda of the general meeting,” and “management’s responsibilities” have little or no meaning to a person just out of high school without some real, adult-world experience.

We believe that, meanwhile, it is first necessary to build the habit of reading in English regularly, first in short, bite-sized pieces, in the hope that regular or at least frequent reading will build up the stamina and endurance necessary to tackle material of TOEIC length and difficulty, while working to learn business and other high-level vocabulary, heretofore little-used grammatical constructions, and complex sentences. We have chosen a “light news” or “morning wide show” approach to sweeten the task of confronting native-level English, with topics we hope will be of interest to the students, topics that are funny, entertaining, even informative. Salted among such light news topics are news stories related to the airline, hotel, travel, and other industries where students are hoping to find employment.

Facebook as a platform for sharing information is well-suited for sharing such news. It is itself a news page but usually on an individual level between a network(s) of friends and associates. We have created the private Facebook group “News for TOEIC” to up the level of this information-sharing from what one is eating or watching on TV now to short news stories and comments that are more about the world about them than so much about their personal lives, but in any case, all in native-level English.

In doing so, we have found that interest in maintaining or upgrading English reading skills goes beyond students currently attending the college. A significant portion of the “News for TOEIC” membership includes those who graduated many years ago. The involvement of graduates is especially good. Faculty and staff and selected members of the general world community also participate.

The links that are established through Facebook and “News for TOEIC” go well beyond TOEIC study itself. Graduates and friends around the world share their knowledge, experience, and even assistance with younger students coming after them, which helps maintain a far-reaching *kizuna* (絆) relationship within the SAIJO community and beyond. We have also found that the Facebook platform is especially good for maintaining contact in times of emergency.

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The Facebook site “News for TOEIC” is personal and private site created and administered by the author of this paper. It is NOT an official site of Saitama Women’s Junior College (埼玉女子短期大学) nor is it endorsed by the college.

APPENDIX

Below are examples of some of the numerous actual posts I have put up on “News for TOEIC” since its inception on June 21, 2012. We have tried to include a wide variety of topics of interest in native-level English —not just straight business— in the hope that they would hold students’ interest and keep them reading frequently, the key, we feel, to developing reading skills in English. We describe this as our “morning wide-show approach.” Non-personal sources are from Japan Today.

Kenneth Kuroiwa NHK Radio has been broadcasting from studios in Dalian (大連). They’ve been talking with Japanese residents of Dalian and with a few of the Dalian people there. They’ve talked with quite a few kids there. From Dalian, they were also talking with Japanese in Vancouver, B.C., in Canada (Sunday, Dec 9, 16:10) (in Japanese).

Like Unfollow Post **Sunday at 4:18pm near Tokyo, Japan**

Seen by 14

Now NHK was talking about Seattle's International District. They didn't mention any store names, but they were obviously referring to Uwajimaya and DAISO across the street (17:21). **Sunday at 5:24pm** · Like

Not exactly TOEIC English, but it IS English. Here is "Gangnam Style" (again....), with still photos and PSY singing in Korean, BUT with English subtitles (字幕). So, if you want to know what PSY is singing about, here it is (it looks like the official English translation that I have seen on official sites):

PSY "Gangnam Style" (English Subtitles) www.youtube.com

Seen by 23

SmartMoney magazine (online) article titled "Best Airlines for 5 Kinds of Flights." Part 2: On-time Arrivals:

Best: Hawaiian Airlines. In 2011, 92.8% of the airline's flights arrived on time, up from 92.5% in 2010, according to the Airline Quality Rating. They had the second-lowest rate of bumped passengers, at 0.11 per 10,000 boarded; however, that's up from 0.04 in 2010. So far for 2012, they have the highest rate of on-time arrivals and departures for domestic flights, and the fewest canceled flights, according to DOT data.

Like · Unfollow Post · December 6 at 10:16am near Tokyo, Japan

Peach Aviation passes 1 million passenger milestone – ANA favored for new slots – JAL ties with the Colonel...

Peach Aviation Ltd. logged its 1 millionth passenger Thursday in a ceremony at Kansai airport in Osaka...

"Kate" News: "News for TOEIC" member Kate in Minami Sôma says: "New opportunity in the works! Had the first planning meeting with a local radio station manager ...THANKS EVERYONE! The program will be

on Minamisoma Hibari FM and will also be broadcast online through Simulradio. As of right now, we are looking at half-hour segments that will be played four times a month. Currently, I'm putting together a rough list of individuals to interview and discussion topics. I'll also be talking about current events happening in Minamisoma and around the world.

..... I'll be hosting my own English-based radio show here in Minamisoma within the next couple months!"

"Ore, ore!" America has "Ore, ore!" cases too, right in the Washington, D.C. area.

'Grandchild' swindlers hit Montgomery residents. Callers claim to be relatives in trouble and ask for money to be sent quickly

Taylor Swift's boyfriend of the month: Well, Taylor Swift is back after splitting up with Conor Kennedy (of THE Kennedys) after a summer romance and is apparently now seeing Harry Styles of the boy band "One Direction." It's kinda hard to keep up, but my sister in California keeps an eye out for these things for me.... In addition to Kennedy, previous boyfriends have included Joe Jonas, Jake Gyllenhaal, John Mayer and Taylor Lautner => **Taylor Swift dating Harry Styles?**

"Japan overcame a four-goal deficit to draw 5-5 with Portugal ... in the FIFA Futsal World Cup ... in Thailand, keeping alive their hopes of qualifying for the knockout stage." [The team is still in the qualifying rounds. They have not yet qualified for the Futsal World Cup.]

qualified - I don't think he is qualified to be a doctor

Cabin crew opinions about passengers....

Who do cabin crew think is the perfect passenger? A survey of more than 700 international cabin crew members in 85 countries by global travel search site Skyscanner has...

Burger King offers all-you-can-eat Whopper Buffet

Burger King Japan is pulling out the stops with their boldest promotion yet: an all-you-can-eat...

“Ike-men Osôji-tai” ??? No time for cleaning? These hot guys will take care of it for you (www.japantoday.com) Are you too busy or tired to clean your home? I'm sure many of us feel that way often enough; ... Misaki...What a brilliant idea! The business will succeed in Tokyo !

Hamasaki dating one of her dancers Singer Ayumi Hamasaki is dating one of her dancers. Hamasaki, 34, made the announcement Wednesday night on her fan club...

People magazine says Channing Tatum is sexiest man

www.japantoday.com Channing Tatum is People magazine's "sexiest man alive" for 2012. The 32-year-old actor says his first...

When do Japanese people have their first kiss? Japanese men aren't known for being the most romantically aggressive bunch. Many young Japanese women lament over having to take...

Kyary Pamyu Pamyu's world tour to start in February Model-singer Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, 19, announced this week that her world concert tour will start in...

Japanese cars ranked best once again in U.S. consumer (消費者) survey.

Japanese cars take top seven spots in latest Consumer Reports survey And the winner is ... Japan. Japanese brands took the top seven spots in Consumer Reports' annual reliability rankings, pushing...

If your order at McDonald's here in Japan, especially in Saitama, is, "Give me the money in your cash register," McDonald's employees are ready for you —with a smile, of course!

McDonald's staff trained to throw tracking balls at armed robbers Police in Saitama have teamed up with McDonald's Japan to offer staff training to cope with a possible....

WORKS CONSULTED

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- 1 SAIJO is the Japanese-style shortening of the first two words in the college's Japanese name: "SAItama JOshi Tanki Daigaku" (Saitama Women's Junior College). The abbreviation of English version of the name is the acronym SWJC, but SAIJO is the more commonly used version at the college.
- 2 A (2011?) Japanese TV program (for which I do not have citation details) pointed out Samsung's high English language qualification requirement: it said that a TOEIC 750 was required merely to get into the company at the ground level; a TOEIC 900 or better was required of those in management.
- 3 In general, students are selected or assigned to this level class based on an English placement test that all students take as soon as they enter the college. There are classes for students estimated to be at the entry level (roughly 0–200??), TOEIC 400 classes for those at the beginner level (roughly 200–300), and classes for those who are already fairly competent in English (or at least at taking English proficiency tests) and who are estimated to be already at or close to the 500–600 range. (Statistically, one should be able to score about 260 points even by simply selecting "B" (for example) for every question in the test: 30 three-choice questions and 170 four-choice questions, averaging about 4.95 TOEIC points for each correct answer.)
- 4 A specific example where revealing one's personal information on Facebook can lead to trouble is if, say, John reveals on Facebook, "Hey, I'm leaving for Honolulu for vacation for a week," Someone seeing this, knowing that John lives alone, will realize that probably no one is home at John's place. If someone wants to break in and burglarize John's home, this is the perfect opportunity.
- 5 We have had a variety of one-month, three-month, six-month, and one year programs at Creighton University, Omaha, NE; Sam Houston State College, Huntsville, TX; Edmonds Community College, Lynnwood, WA; Hawthorn English Language Centres, Melbourne, Australia and Auckland, New Zealand) and other overseas programs (short internship programs with JTB Canada (Vancouver); Kinki Nippon Tourist/KNT (Guam); All Nippon Airways/ANA (Dalian, China).
- 6 Keeping in touch with graduates through Facebook and/or "News for TOEIC" has had other benefits as well. Several times in the first few months of "News for TOEIC," students, both current and past, have asked me about study-abroad, working holidays, and travel or life overseas. The best resources for this are students with that kind of experience or who even currently live or work overseas. I have put several students in touch with their senpai, who can give them the benefit of their experience, through Facebook and our "News for TOEIC" network. In our study-abroad orientation sessions, we have noted, enviously, that students going overseas might or might not pay close attention to what we faculty and staff are saying, but when a senpai, who is close to their own age and has had the same kind of experience in the same destination country and setting, is speaking, they listen with rapt attention.
- 7 I cannot say that it is a result of "News for TOEIC," but two of the members (one from

the Business Department) have taken to making personal Facebook posts almost exclusively in English. Their posts are short and simple and about the simplest things in their lives, but they post frequently. Their objective is to post in English at least once and, if possible, several times a day. There are mistakes, of course, but that is entirely beside the point.

- 8 Online social networking site Facebook was created and launched by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg from his dormitory room in February 2004. As of September 14, 2012, the number of active users topped one billion (Fowler).
- 9 Save Minamisoma Project: www.saveminamisoma.org
- 10 This comes out when we tell students to write down their SAIJO Mail address on various application forms a few months into their first year. We sometimes get a blank look and “What SAIJO Mail address??”