

The Extremely Short Story Competition (ESSC): A Successful Case in Japan

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The enlightening and educational creation of the Extremely Short Story Competition (ESSC) by Peter Hassall, UAE, could not have contributed to Japanese learners and users of English without its introduction to Japan by Nobuyuki Honna. Thanks to Honna's foresight and insight into its educational value, the Japanese Association for Asian Englishes successfully administered the first ESSC in Japan in 2006 and proceeded to another in 2007. In honor of Honna's efforts and contribution, therefore, this paper discusses the basic concept of the ESSC and the overall process of the competition mostly in reference to the Steering Committee's commitment, participants and their works, and its favorable educational effect and future possibilities of its development. Much of the description of the competition is intended for those who may endeavor to administer the ESSC in their own countries to make it a bigger and more international educational event, so that more users and learners of English in the world will benefit from their experience in writing extremely short stories and participating in the ESSC.

It sometimes occurs that a simple introduction of a "good" teaching/learning theory or method from a foreign classroom hardly works in our own. The teaching/learning environment may be too different from that of its origin, or the students may have very different and unique interests, motives, skills and tendencies. A teacher, after a while, could begrudge another's success in a foreign country, saying, "It's their success, not mine." Nobuyuki Honna, however, seemed to have no doubt whatsoever over the effectiveness of Japanese students' creating English stories as *short* as exactly 50 words. "It was their success, and will be our success as well," he must have thought. This is how many Japanese learners of English—junior and senior high students, college students, young and not so young office workers, and many more—are writing stories as *many* as 50 words.

The concern of this paper, therefore, is to discuss the first Extremely Short Story Competition (ESSC) that took place in Japan in 2006¹. The paper mainly focuses on the basic concept of the story-writing as well as the competition, the actual management of the contest, an analysis of the entrants, and some educational effects of the ESSC on learners of the English language in Japan. The author strongly believes that the ESSC has greatly contributed to those who were involved in the competition in various ways, and will continue to do so not only in Japan but also elsewhere.

The Background

The concept of writing 50-word-long English stories was originated by Peter Hassall of Zayed University, UAE². He developed it into a competition, so that his students could both practice English writing and get awarded for their performances. Therefore, the first ESSC ever took place in UAE in 2004, in which 150 students of Zayed University contributed 250

extremely short stories³. Soon, the idea was imported to Japan by Honna. The Japanese Association for Asian Englishes (JAF AE), over which Honna presides, decided to take the responsibility of administering the ESSC in Japan as part of the commemorative events for celebrating the association's 10th anniversary.

The JAF AE sponsored the first ESSC for three months, October through December, 2006. The supporters of the first ESSC Japan were eight educational organizations that took interest in English education: Edvec Inc. (Yokohama, Japan), the Editorial Department of *English Teachers' Magazine*, Taishukan Publishing Co., Ltd. (Tokyo, Japan), the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP), Inc., (Tokyo, Japan), Benesse Corporation (Okayama, Japan), Pearson Education (Tokyo, Japan), Z-KAI Co., Ltd. (Shizuoka, Japan), Cambridge University Press Japan (Tokyo, Japan) and ALC Co., Ltd. (Tokyo, Japan). The support from these companies and organizations resulted from Honna's enthusiastic "advertising" efforts.

These educational organizations supported the contest financially, so that the Steering Committee of the ESSC could administer the event successfully and that the prize winners could receive what they deserved. In addition, Oxford University Press provided the Steering Committee with their dictionaries for English learners, so that they might be presented to the prize winners. The first ESSC Japan could not have been so successful without support and cooperation of many groups of people who acknowledged the educational significance of the competition, not to mention Hassall's incomparable creation in the first place and Honna's insight into its pedagogical value.

Emiratia: World English Voices of Emirati Women

Emiratia: World English Voices of Emirati Women is a collection of stories enrolled in the first ESSC at Zayed University. The JAF AE decided to publish the Japanese version of *Emiratia* in order for Japanese learners of English to understand what "extremely short stories" might be, under what topics they might be expected to write, and how the stories might be created in an effective way. Therefore, the ESSC Steering Committee, composed of some voluntary members of the Executive Board, compiled the Japanese guidebook for the ESSC, *Emiratia: World English Voices of Emirati Women~JAF AE's Official Guidebook to the Extremely Short Story Competition~*. The book was published in July 2006 by Edvec Inc.

The Japanese guidebook carries an introduction in Japanese by the JAF AE President Honna and the ESSC Steering Committee, Preface by the Editor, and its translation into Japanese. The remaining pages are given to 237 extremely short stories by Zayed University students. In its Preface, Hassall writes:

It is hoped that this little volume will be the first of the World English Voices Series authored by peoples of all nations from all over the world, and that it will mark the beginnings of a world English literature for Emirati people, whose perspective will become increasingly significant in years to come. (2006, xiii)

Since we realized through the ESSC the importance and possibility of collecting and exchanging voices of various peoples in different varieties of English, the JAF AE willingly agreed with Hassall in that all royalties from the Japanese *Emiratia* should be used as a fund to encourage the ESSC in needy countries.

The Japanese *Emiratia* has not only been entertaining but also helping Japanese learners and teachers of English at various institutions, from junior and senior high schools, colleges and universities, to private English conversation schools. As we receive and accumulate works from Japanese writers and gain more experience through the competitions, we hope to revise the book to include extremely short stories written by Japanese participants in the ESSC. An English book that carries works of such a great number of Japanese-English writers will certainly be a significant addition to the world English literature.

The Management of the ESSC

The Steering Committee of the ESSC⁴ has exclusively been in charge of the administration and management of the ESSC. The committee members worked assiduously in quite a short time before it started accepting entries in October 2006. Honna continually supported the committee members by providing them with valuable advice whenever he thought it appropriate to do so. The preparatory steps included the following:

1. To set up a website for the ESSC, which later was incorporated in the official website of the JAF AE.
2. To prepare the application form using the Common Gateway Interface.
3. To advertise the ESSC and invite entries.
4. To establish a system to accept and handle the entries as well as the contestants' data.
5. To recruit supporting organizations and raise funds.
6. To establish a system to judge the entries and select the winners.
7. To prepare for the commendation.

Steps 1 through 4 had to be taken before October 1 while Step 5 was taken after the ESSC started, and Steps 6 and 7 even after December 31, the deadline for entries. Without any preceding experience, the Steering Committee managed to administer the first contest with trial and error. That means future steering committees in Japan and other countries could certainly learn from our experience for better and smoother administration.

The Website

The Steering Committee thought it necessary to have a staff member who could work for the competition from a technical and technological point of view. A capable web designer, therefore, was invited from outside the JAF AE to work closely with the committee. The JAF AE paid a due amount for his task.

The ESSC Japan conformed itself to the ESSC UAE in that all works should be submitted digitally in Power Point files. Therefore, the technical environment had to be kept in good condition, so that stories should be accepted through the website 24 hours a day for three consecutive months. While the ESSC UAE accepted entries exclusively from university students⁵, the ESSC Japan was open to English learners nationwide at any level, from junior high school students to elderly citizens. This made the background of the participants diverse

and varied, and therefore required the Steering Committee to be alert to questions and suggests all the time.

Thus, we made it possible for anybody interested in the competition to contact us by e-mail while we accepted entries through the JAF AE website. Here are some of the questions we received:

- Whether the writers' data would be made public⁶;
- Whether there was a limit to the number of stories one person could enter⁷;
- Whether it was possible to submit stories by regular mail⁸;
- Whether each entry should be accompanied by one application form, or whether it was possible for one form to take care of a group of students entering from the same school⁹.

These questions as well as many others were responded promptly but carefully by the Steering Committee. Whenever necessary, in addition, the committee members discussed how they should respond to some of the questions and suggestions. Although the competition itself did not involve any interactions between the contestants and the Steering Committee, communication by e-mail helped both the entrants and the committee to understand the others' needs and requirements.

All the entries were examined to make sure they have met the ESSC requirements¹⁰ before they were shown on the website. At the same time, all the writers' data were collated in an Excel chart for later use. The web pages for the entries were updated every week. In order to perform these tasks, the Steering Committee hired a student, in addition to the specialist to maintain the website as mentioned above, who could help keep the website and the story-writers' information updated. Digital processing of the extremely short stories and the writers' information required human resources with appropriate skills, precision and enthusiasm.

Publicity

As has already been mentioned above, the first ESSC Japan was supported by the following organizations: Edvec Inc., the Editorial Department of *English Teachers' Magazine*, Taishukan Publishing Co., Ltd., the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP), Inc., Benesse Corporation, Pearson Education, Z-KAI Co., Ltd., Cambridge University Press Japan, and ALC Co., Ltd. These educational organizations not only supported the competition financially but also helped the Steering Committee advertise the event through various media available for them.

Edvec Inc., for example, put up full information about the ESSC on their website¹¹. What was unique about their website was that those who visited their website could not only read sample stories but could also listen to them as well. We believe that this contributed to arousing people's interest in the ESSC to a great extent. The other organizations helped the Steering Committee advertise the ESSC by posting announcements on their website and in their publications.

Prior to the opening of the ESSC, the Steering Committee held a panel discussion, "The ESSC (Extremely Short Story Competition): Its Significance and Practices in Japan," at the

19th JAF AE National Conference in July 2006. In this panel, the ESSC was officially introduced to the JAF AE members, its significance for Japanese English learners was clarified, some examples of practices in the classroom were presented, and how to enter through the website was explained.

Toward the end of the competition, the Steering Committee gave an interim report in December 2006 on the ESSC, "The ESSC: Its Practices and Developments," at the 20th JAF AE National Conference and asked for more participation by the members and their students. These academic approaches to the ESSC by the Steering Committee and other members of the JAF AE resulted in getting the attention of many English teachers and advanced learners.

Unlike the ESSC UAE, the ESSC Japan was intended not only for university students but also younger students and adult learners¹². In order to draw high school students' attention, the Steering Committee sent out fliers by e-mail and fax to the Board of Education at all the 47 administrative divisions of Japan¹³ and to all the Super English Language High Schools¹⁴ designated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. As a result, some high school teachers took interest in the ESSC and encouraged their students to participate in the competition.

The Funds

The ESSC was funded as noted above; the Steering Committee used some of the money for carrying out the competition. In addition, in order to make the ESSC as attractive as it could be, awards and prizes were to be given to outstanding works. Fortunately, we had eight organizations which agreed to financially support the competition. As the JAF AE paid the student who worked part time for data-processing, the Steering Committee was able to spend most of the funds raised from the supporting organizations for prizes given to excellent extremely short stories.

It was difficult for the Steering Committee, at the first stage of the competition, to fix how many prizes to give and how much money to spend on each prize. Therefore, we waited until the competition was closed before we decided the details about the prizes. Honna had hoped to award many good story-writers for further encouragement rather than to award only a few extravagantly.

Eventually, in the category of college students and adult learners, two people received the highest award of 20,000-yen worth book coupons, five people got 3,000-yen worth book coupons and the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (7th edition) as the second prize, four people got the 3,000-yen worth book coupons as the third prize, and nine people received 1,000-yen worth book coupons as the fourth prize. High school students got prizes in their categories. Three senior high school students got 10,000-yen worth book coupons for their outstanding works, another got 5,000-yen worth book coupons for his excellent work, and two students got 2,000-yen worth book coupons for their fine works. In the category of junior high school students, one student was presented with 10,000-yen worth book coupons for her excellent work and two others with 5,000-yen worth book coupons for their fine works.

Notwithstanding the ages of the winners, we chose book coupons as the prizes partially from an educational viewpoint and partially for the purpose of encouraging further English study. The Steering Committee was informed later from different sources that the awards

were encouraging, attractive and stimulating. The committee found prizes quite significant in an event like this, and therefore securing enough funds is an important part of administering the ESSC.

The Screening

The winners were selected through several screening processes; a preliminary screening by five members of the ESSC Steering Committee, the semi-final screening by eight voluntary members of the JAF AE board members, and the final screening by four judges appointed by the Steering Committee. At any stage of the screening, we avoided presenting the judges with a clear standard for valuation basis, except that a story should be original and creative, and grammatically comprehensible. No points were given to any artistic effect of the Power Point file.

Not all extremely short stories were valid. Of the 750 entries, 614 turned out to be valid, while the other 136 stories were judged as disqualified mostly because they did not have exactly 50 words. The Steering Committee evaluated these 614 stories and selected 417 good ones for further screening. At the semi-final stage, eight out of the 16 members of the JAF AE Executive Board took the responsibility of screening these 417 stories to select the top 60. Finally, the four final judges, Peter Hassall, Paul Kei Matsuda¹⁵, Nobuyuki Honna¹⁶ and Yuko Takeshita¹⁷, each chose outstanding stories among the 60 finalists to single out 20 award winners.

Concurrently, the Steering Committee separated 289 stories out of the 614 valid entries, which were written by junior and senior high school students. The committee carefully evaluated these short stories on a separate basis, supposing that screening the stories by young contestants with older and adult learners of English would work quite unfavorably¹⁸. Ten prize winners were selected, therefore, in the two high school categories.

The screening took two months as it involved as many as 17 people acting as judges at three different stages. However complicated and troublesome it may become, the Steering Committee believes it better to involve many people before the prize winners are chosen. In this way, it becomes possible for the screening to take on an objective character. As the scores each story could get may easily be influenced by personal preferences of the people who undertake the screening, the more judges there are, the higher the possibility is of different personal criteria to be offset.

The Commendation

Although we did not hold a commendation ceremony, the winners and their short stories were announced on the JAF AE website at the end of April 2007. The names of the winners who wished to remain anonymous were given in the initials. The prizes were sent out within one month after the announcement.

At the 21st national conference of the JAF AE, the Steering Committee once again gave a presentation to summarize the first ESSC Japan. For this occasion, the top winners had recited their own extremely short stories and had them recorded. When their stories were presented at the conference, the JAF AE members enjoyed not only reading the stories but also listening to them. Although recitation was not part of the ESSC, the recorded stories were

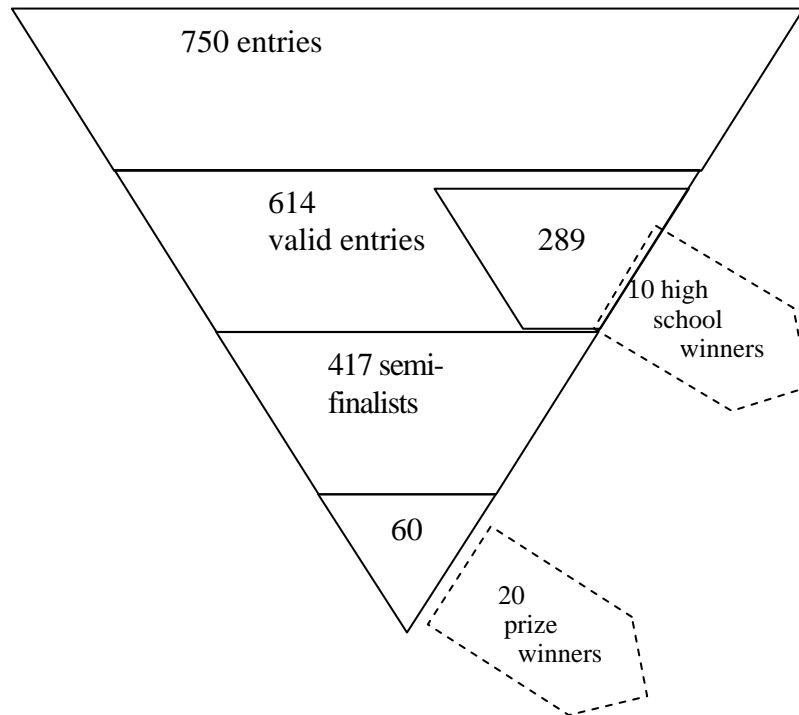


Figure 1: Screening Processes

good enough to compensate for the absences of the writers because no prize winners had been invited to present themselves at the conference.

Three universities, Tokyo Keizai University, Toyo Eiwa University and Aoyama Gakuin University, in which some winners belonged as undergraduate students, introduced the ESSC and announced the results on their own websites. This was quite educational in two respects: it was truly rewarding and encouraging for the winners, and it also encouraged other students on campus toward the second ESSC Japan. Some other websites including, of course, the JAF AE website had articles about the ESSC Japan.

The second book on the ESSC published in UAE, *Pearls of Emirati Wisdom: World English voices of the UAE*, carried the top two winners in the college/general category of the ESSC Japan with 50-word commentaries by Matsuda and Honna¹⁹ as well. Another book, *Rays of the Rising Sun: World English Voices of Japan*, carries extremely short stories of the first ESSC Japan, waiting to be on sale. These websites and publications have contributed to making the ESSC better known on an international basis, providing the competition with a possibility of becoming more international and intercultural in nature.

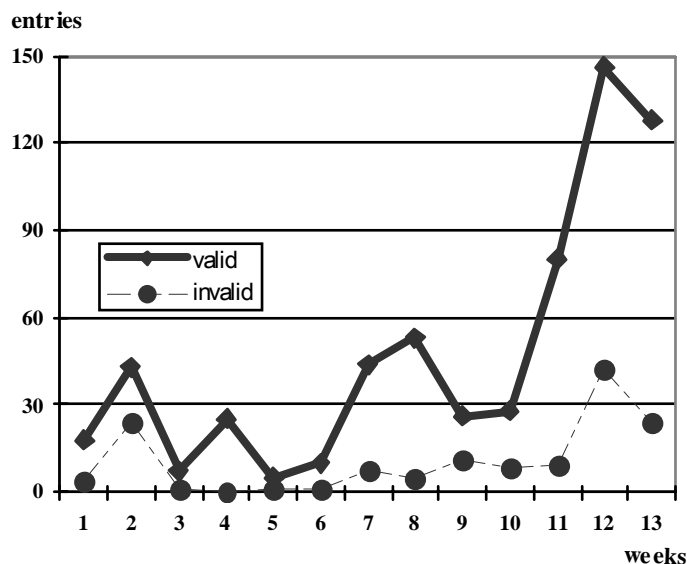


Figure 2: Number of Entries

Entries

Entrants

As Figure 2 shows, the Steering Committee did not receive entries on a regular basis. This was probably and partially because the ESSC had not yet been widely known prior to the start of the competition. As the time went on, more entries were arriving. There were not many entries at the beginning partially because even those who had known about the ESSC preferred to wait and see how others' short stories might read like.

As Figures 3 and 4 indicate, the entrants may be analyzed according to the age groups: adults, college students²⁰, and senior and junior high school students. A great majority of entries were from college students in any of the weeks except for the last two, when many junior and senior high school students submitted their extremely short stories.

Students seemed to have been encouraged by their teachers to participate in the competition, and they actually seem to have written the stories as part of their classroom activities²¹. In the 12th week, among the 59 entries from senior high school students, 53 came from the same high school. Likewise, in the 13th week that had 55 entries from junior high school students and 52 from senior high school students, 30 out of the 52 senior high entries came from the same school, and 47 out of 55 junior high entries came from another school. The tendency for junior and senior high school students was that they probably had an opportunity, with the teachers' instruction and encouragement, to write the stories in group and submit them at the same time. It seems important, in case of high schools, to ask for

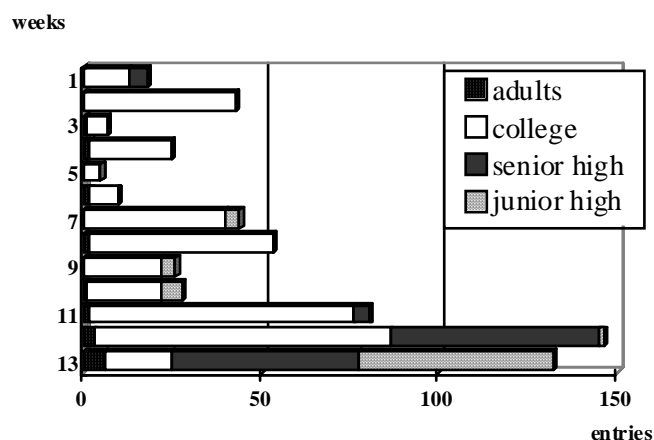


Figure 3: Valid Entries According to Groups

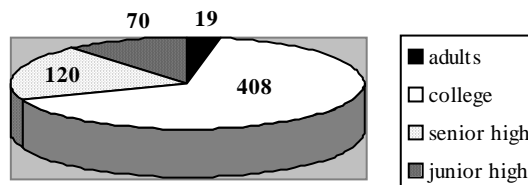


Figure 4: Valid Entries According to Groups-2

teachers' involvement in order to have their students participate in this kind of story-writing activities.

Taking into consideration the fact that not all public high schools allow students to have free access to the Internet on campus, the Steering Committee is ready to accept extremely short stories entered by post. In this way, the JAF AE expects even more high school students to make use of the ESSC as a meaningful experience of creative writing.

Entries

As mentioned above, of the 614 entries, 19 were written by non-student adults, 408 by college students, 120 by senior high school students and 70 by junior high school students. It is quite evident that college students were the main participants of the ESSC, but this does not necessarily mean that the ESSC is most appropriate for college students in terms of concept, level, style, and so on. The fact must have contributed to the large participation by college

students that the percentage of the JAF AE members associated in some way with colleges and universities is much higher than those of junior and senior high school teachers.

In other words, we cannot conclude just by looking at the percentages of the groups of entrants that writing an extremely short story is too difficult for younger learners of English in Japan. The learning content in junior high school English curricula proves that the younger students are technically well qualified for the ESSC. According to *The Course of Study for Foreign Languages* issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology or MEXT (2003), students in the lower secondary school (junior high school) are supposed to learn the following vocabulary items:

Words, collocations and idioms

1. Up to approximately 900 words²²...(including basic words relating to everyday life such as words for the seasons, months, days of the week, time, weather, numbers including ordinal numbers, family, etc.)
2. Basic collocations
3. Basic idioms such as "excuse me," "I see," "I'm sorry," "thank you," "you're welcome," "for example," etc.

Likewise, the grammatical items which *The Course of Study for Foreign Languages* (MEXT, 2003) requires junior high school students to learn include the following:

Grammatical items

1. Sentences
 - a. Simple, compound and complex sentences
 - b. Affirmative and negative declarative sentences
 - c. Affirmative and negative imperative sentences
 - d. Interrogative sentences that begin with a verb or an auxiliary verb such as *can*, *do*, *may*, etc., that contain *or*, and that begin with an interrogative such as *how*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *which*, *who*, *whose* and *why*


It seems that junior high school graduates are ready to compete in the ESSC as far as knowledge of vocabulary and grammar is concerned. Indeed, three of the top 12 stories at one stage of the final screening were the entries by senior high school students²³. Taking into consideration that a short story could be acknowledged as being an excellent piece not only because of correct grammatical usage and proper use of vocabulary items but also because of the creative impression that the story conveys to the reader, high school students are never disadvantaged in any way.

Here are the stories of the two winners in the collage/adult category, both written by college students²⁴. "Tears" was written by a female student while "Fire in your mouth" by a male student. "Tears" was presented on a bluish background while "Fire in your mouth" on a purplish background with a pattern of the world map.

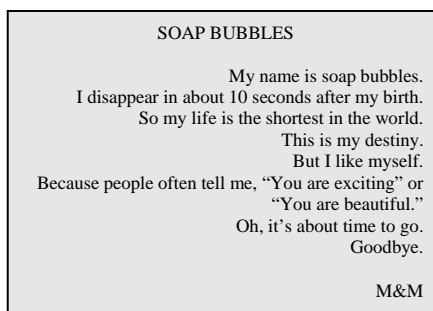
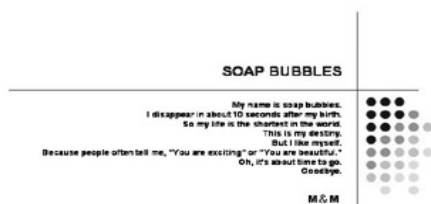
Tears	Fire in your mouth
<p>One night, the telephone rang. My father answered it. He was just nodding without saying anything. He seemed very serious. Then, he hanged up the phone and told us. “My father has just passed away.” It was the first and the only time when I saw his eyes with tears.</p>	<p>The words you speak are just like a smoldering fire. Words can be a fire that warms your heart. Words can be a blazing fire that burns you to death. Words can be a torch that lightens the way you walk. How to use the fire is up to you.</p>

An English teacher might by instinct feel like improving these stories²⁵. Indeed, many entries lost in the competition because of flaws that were too serious to be overlooked in terms of fluency and/or grammatical comprehensiveness. At the same time, it is true that winners got the prizes not because their English was better, and it is equally true that grammatically flawless stories were not always ranked high unless they had other attractive characteristics.

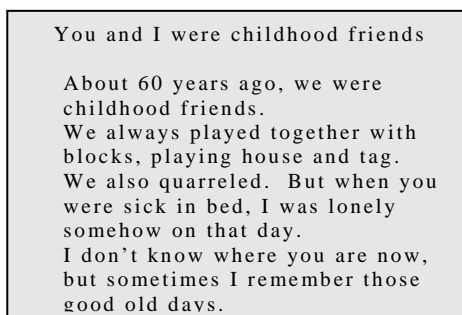
Here is one of the award-winning stories in the senior high school category. “The Life of Eighty” at a glance reads as if it were a combination of recollection and expectation of an elderly lady who is about to tell her story to her young relative. This alone gives the reader a sense of warm and happy life. The reader is amazed to know, however, that a 16-year-old girl wrote this imaginary story about her life which could or could not turn out to be true in 64 years’ time. The reader, therefore, cannot help wishing her life to be as satisfactory as the one she has imagined.

The Life of Eighty	The Life of Eighty
 <p>“64 years ago, I was 16 years old. I studied hard for university, enjoyed playing softball, and was in love with a boy. I was young like you. Having lived with my beloved for 53 years, I am happy now!” I will tell my grandchildren like that friendly at garden.</p>	<p>The Life of Eighty</p> <p>“64 years ago, I was 16 years old. studied hard for university, enjoyed playing softball and was in love with a boy. I was young like you. Having lived with my beloved for 53 years, I am happy now!” I will tell my grandchildren like that friendly at garden.</p>

In the other outstanding story by a senior high school girl, she writes as if she were “soup bubbles” which, despite their own ephemeral fate, are flattered by human beings’ favorable comments on them and love themselves before they vanish. The way she ends the story happily prevents the reader from feeling gloomy about the bubbles’ vanity.



Among many young writers of the 50-word-long stories, a 62-year-old gentleman was awarded the second prize in the college/adult category. This story actually goes back several decades in the writer's life to talk about a childhood friend whom he stopped seeing a long time ago. Participation of an elderly person in the ESSC with a high prize is truly encouraging not only to young students but also adult English learners/users in general.



The ESSC as an Educational Activity

As has been described above, the first ESSC Japan took place with many participants at different levels. In accordance with the fact that Japanese English learners have been more varied than ever involving little children and elderly people in retirement, the ESSC could manifest itself as a wonderful goal for a large population of English learners to aim at. Providing as many people as possible who take interest in studying English with some creative writing experience is one of the reasons why the JAF AE decided to hold the competition open to a wider population of English learners. The Steering Committee could have otherwise restricted the participants to college and university students to make the management of the contest simpler and easier.

Needless to say, composing an extremely short story was an authentic experience for all the participants, which is not always the case in the English learning environment in Japan. Hassall (2006) emphasizes the importance of the authenticity and the resulting effect of writing extremely short stories in one of his essays:

There is a danger that our students' writing becomes meaningful only as far as it ends

up in the assessment archives of our universities and colleges. The Extremely Short Story Competition (ESSC), as introduced here, provides an educational event designed to fulfill a very real need of our student writers by offering a safe, secure environment where their voices can be heard by a much wider audience than is usually available, even from within the language classroom. (p. 90)

In many contests and competitions that involve English learning activities, whether they be a contest for delivering one's own speech, reciting a famous public speech or writing an essay, only the selected works are presented to the public for appreciation. On the other hand, the extremely short stories, once submitted, were displayed on the website for anybody who visited the site. They may be read by the world readers who could receive various messages of the writers sent with those 50 words. Such a way of presentation could be an exciting and thrilling experience for the writers of the stories, giving them an opportunity to "interact" with the world users of English.

As far as the level of difficulty of writing an extremely short story is concerned, it could be a challenging experience for junior high school students. This is because writing an English paragraph that is as long as 50 words may not be a familiar task for them. At the same time, however, it holds true that a creation of an extremely short story can never seem too strange and too difficult for these young students because they have been used to reading stories much longer than 50 words in their textbooks and elsewhere. Senior high school students, on the other hand, have had more experience in writing more and longer sentences than those junior high school students are used to.

The ESSC gives people a good opportunity to write creatively. The only restriction writers are given is the number of words they are allowed to write. This type of free writing is not frequently done in Japanese classrooms; students are often provided with themes and topics to write about, with sections or chapters of a textbook to summarize or comment on, or even with Japanese sentences for them to translate. The ESSC, therefore, is a very good way to give them productive and creative experiences.

Writing an extremely short story is not an easy task even for some college students. This means that it can be an excellent activity in university classrooms as well. Miyake (2007) describes how she implemented the ESS writing in her English classes at a Japanese university. Notwithstanding several problems that she experienced with her students, she finds the ESSC a significant opportunity in which her students could "demonstrate their writing skills and unleash their imagination."

Conclusion

Thus, the first ESSC Japan was undoubtedly a successful event. There were many entries which have proven to be colorful, interesting, creative and painstaking. Many entrants, varied in age, skill and experience, participated in the event and found it meaningfully challenging. Moreover, it was an event that was supported by various educational organizations both financially and psychologically.

The JAF AE, especially the Steering Committee of the ESSC, had such a wonderful opportunity of taking the responsibility in holding the competition that in the end, we would like to share our success with more people from different parts of the world. Specifically, the

JAF AE decided to further develop and hold the competition on an international basis. To begin with, the second ESSC which took place for seven months in 2007 started accepting entries from Chinese writers of English accessing our website in China. With digital entries through the Internet, an international event like this may be held without much difficulty.

In an international situation, Japanese users of English will have a clearer awareness of writing extremely short stories from a Japanese perspective, because they know that international readers are enjoying their stories on the Internet. Writing to communicate internationally will be a rewarding experience for many young students who are sure to be communicating in English in the future with people with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

By comparing their stories with Chinese stories in the second ESSC Japan, they can recognize differences that might have arisen from cultural differences; the Chinese topics may be quite different from their own, the way Chinese writers describe their interests could be quite unique, and the impressions the Chinese stories give may prove to be quite new and surprising. The Chinese writers of English, of course, should learn many things vice versa. In this way, the ESSC International will contribute a lot to numerous users of Englishes.

Lastly, here are three extremely short stories written by three of the judges in the final screening, Honna, Hassall, and Matsuda. These 50-word congratulatory remarks for the first ESSC Japan convey precious messages to all participants in the competition as well as prospective writers of extremely short stories composed in Japan as well as in different parts of the world. May Englishes in the world prosper in the future ESSCs!

The Will to Write

"It's too early for my students to write,"
I have heard teachers say.
More words, more structures,
more this, more that...

But I beg to differ, seeing
these works thoughtfully crafted
with colorful words and cheerful images,
or quiet hue and gloomy phrases,
and a touch of brilliance and originality.

Peter H. Hassall

Congratulations!

I was delighted that many students of English,
young and old, participated in Japan's First ESSC.

I was impressed by quite a few pieces. Some
participants told me that they enjoyed writing their
stories. Actually, you can learn English by enjoying
it. This is what the ESSC is all about.

Nobuyuki Honna
President, JAF AE

The ESSC Japan 2007: A Precious Celebration

From the sands of the 'Emirates to the
Land of the Rising Sun,
tiny gems are arising encapsulating our
hopes, fears, lives, and fun.
As history rises, World Englishes grow(s)
from strength to strength.

Without our native languages, without
differences, WE would be impoverished.
Let's celebrate diversity while WE may!

Peter H, UAE 2007

Notes

¹ By the time this paper was completed, the JAF AE had already administered the second ESSC Japan but had not yet finished processing all the entries and the entrants' data. Therefore, this present paper only focuses on the first ESSC Japan.

² For further information, visit: <http://www.kalmen.com/50words/>.

³ The ESSC Japan differs from the ESSC UAE in details such as the way it treats the stories after they have been submitted and the way it qualifies its participants.

⁴ The Steering Committee started with five members who also served as the members of the JAF AE Secretariat. With the publication of the Japanese *Emiratia*, the committee had three of the original members replaced and had one additional member in order to make the ESSC independent of the Secretariat. The author of this paper has been among the ESSC Steering Committee from the start.

⁵ The ESSC UAE defines the ESSC as the following: "The Extremely Short Story Competition is a competition for citizens of the United Arab Emirates, who are studying at national universities and colleges including Zayed University, UAEU and HCT." < http://www.kalmen.com/50words/home/what_is_essc.php >

⁶ The answer is no; if the writer wished to be anonymous, the Steering Committee did not make it public.

⁷ The answer is no; the Steering Committee accepted as many entries from one writer as he/she wished to make. However, one was not able to receive more than one prize.

⁸ The answer is no; in the first ESSC Japan, stories were only received digitally. However, in the second ESSC Japan, high school students' works could be accepted by regular mail.

⁹ The Steering Committee required one story to be accompanied by one application form even when one teacher, for example, was sending dozens of works written by students in the same school.

¹⁰ We especially needed to check if each story had exactly 50 words. In the second ESSC Japan, we left it to the entrants' responsibility to count the number of words contained in a story; we advised the contestants to take advantage of the word counter of Microsoft Word.

¹¹ <http://www.edvec.co.jp/research-institute/essc/index.htm>

¹² In the ESSC UAE, a contestant needs to be Emirati (a citizen of the United Arab Emirates), and must be studying at either Higher Colleges of Technology, United Arab Emirates University or Zayed University.

¹³ These are 44 prefectures and Metropolitan Tokyo, Hokkaido, Osaka and Kyoto.

¹⁴ The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has designated high schools which conduct practical research and development contributing to the future improvement of English language education.

¹⁵ Paul Kei Matsuda, English Department at Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, was invited to screen the entries as a writing expert. His research interests include second language writing, contrastive rhetoric, alternative discourses, voice and identity in writing, electronic discourse, and world Englishes.

¹⁶ He took the responsibility as the president of the JAF AE.

¹⁷ She joined the team representing the Steering Committee.

¹⁸ It turned out that this is not always the case, because the 60 finalists included three high school students.

¹⁹ See the messages in the conclusion of this paper.

²⁰ As far as the commendation was concerned, adults and college students were put together to make one group.

²¹ The Steering Committee is truly grateful to the teachers who must have helped their students take part in the competition, probably by taking the trouble for typing up the stories and sending the PowerPoint files by e-mail.

²² The Ministry has increased the number of words to be studied in junior high school from 900 to 1200 in the newly publicized *Course of Study* that will be implemented in 2012.

²³ These three stories by high school students were removed from the college/adult category to be awarded in the senior high school category.

²⁴ These stories may be read with all the other winners on the JAF AE website:

<http://essc.fit.ac.jp/award_work_html>

²⁵ The Steering Committee did not edit any of the stories before the prize-winning stories were uploaded on the website.

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