

Leveraging AI to Promote Profound Understanding of Foreign Literature

Eric Cruz-Alvarado

Hawaii Pacific University

*Naoyuki Hamada**

Hawaii Pacific University

In this paper, we propose an effective way of using AI to potentially engage learners with the content at a deeper level, enabling them to discuss serious and philosophical questions. Specifically, we will explore whether there are differences between questions generated by teachers and those created by AI, and how the use of AI can contribute to serious and philosophical discussions during class.

Teaching Context

We defined the context in which the lessons would take place to ensure that the lesson plan is feasible. As Eric is learning Japanese at a university and Naoyuki teaches English in Japan, we set the targeted audiences as high-school students in Japan, whose CEFR levels generally range from A2 to B1. We chose *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee as the reading material, which is translated into Japanese as *Arabama Monogatari*, meaning “A Story of Alabama.” In this lesson, we focus solely on Chapter 20 (see Appendix). The goal is for the students to think deeply about the serious issues presented in the book. The duration of the class is 50 minutes, which is common in Japan.

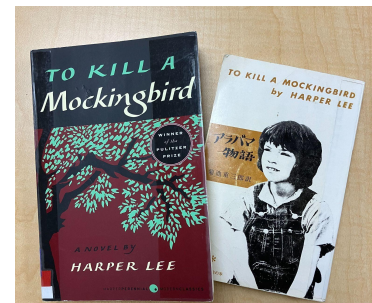


Figure 1

To Kill a Mockingbird / Arabama Monogatari

Lesson Plan

We begin the lesson by activating the students’ schemata by introducing a summary of the novel. Then, the students read the targeted plot individually. The reading may be assigned as homework beforehand to ensure that there will be enough time for discussion later. To confirm everyone’s understanding, the teacher poses several comprehension questions. After this, we delve into critical thinking about the content. This discussion is conducted in groups. Finally, individual students express their opinions in writing. This writing task can also be assigned as homework.



Cruz-Alvarado, E. & Hamada, N. (2024). Leveraging AI to promote profound understanding of foreign literature. *TESOL Working Paper Series*, 22, 91-94.

Website: Hawaii Pacific University <http://www.hpu.edu>.

*Email: nhamadal@my.hpu.edu. Address: TESOL Program, Room 306, Waterfront Plaza 6, 500 Ala Moana Blvd, Honolulu, HI 96813, USA.

Prompts Utilized to Generate AI Materials

The AI generator that was utilized in making the materials for this lesson was GPT3.5 (free version). The first piece of material that was generated was a summary for Chapter 20 of “To Kill A Mockingbird.” The chapter was copied from a pdf file and uploaded to GPT3.5 for processing with the prompt “Can you summarize the following chapter from ‘To Kill A Mockingbird?’” The AI generator was able to give a general summary with some key points that occurred in the story. Afterwards, our follow-up prompt was, “Now can you do that in Japanese?” The reason for the prompt seeming slightly indirect is due to the AI’s capability of following up on the previous prompts that were given to it. The AI at this point developed two summaries, one that was in the target L2 of the students and one that was developed in the students L1.

The comprehension questions followed a similar process based on Chapter 20. The prompt utilized for the questions was “Can you develop 5 comprehension questions based on this chapter that target deeper issues of the book?” The reason to add “that target deeper issues of the book” is due to the AI developing literal comprehension questions that anyone can find in the text of the book. With the aforementioned prompt, the AI knows that the user is requesting a specific type of question that challenges the individual responding to the questions to think about examples that they read. The translation of the questions utilizing the prompt “Can you translate that in Japanese?” instructed the AI to do a direct translation of the questions that were developed prior to the prompt.

AI- vs. Teacher-Generated Questions

We primarily explored whether AI can generate better questions on serious and philosophical issues than humans can. We compared the questions made by teachers to those generated by GPT 3.5.

Questions created by teachers (reproduced from [Quizlet](#))

1. Why does Dolphus Raymond drink Coca-Cola and pretend it is liquor? What does Scout think of him and the reasons he gives for his behavior?
2. During his closing argument, Atticus pauses and does something that astonishes Scout and Jem. What does he do? Why do you think he does it?

Questions created by ChatGPT

3. How does Mr. Dolphus Raymond's character challenge societal norms and prejudices in Maycomb? What do his actions and explanations reveal about the town's attitudes towards race and social conformity?
4. Discuss the significance of Atticus's decision to remove his watch and coat and to loosen his clothing during his speech to the jury. What does this symbolic act represent in terms of his sincerity, vulnerability, and connection with the jury?

First, it was surprising that AI selected the plots and generated questions on them almost as the teachers do. AI identified (or consulted human-generated sources that identified) the scenes that lead to deeper discussions.

However, there is a notable difference in how the questions are posed. The questions created by the teacher are centered around the characters, aiming to encourage students to make inferences based on those details. On the other hand, the questions made by ChatGPT seem to directly address the students after summarizing the messages embedded in the story. The AI’s questions focus on the philosophical issues of the book, relying more on summaries than on actions performed by characters. Although this approach would be advantageous for discussing the book in its entirety, when it comes to guiding deep contemplation on specific chapters or plots, the teacher’s method has the advantage of drawing learners’ attention to details that are significant to those specific scenes.

How AI Contributes to the Lesson

AI can significantly ease the workload for teachers and enhance learning for students in several ways. Firstly, AI can efficiently summarize long stories in both the students' L1 and their L2, simplifying complex texts. This is particularly useful as reading full novels in the L2 can be daunting. By streamlining the process, AI facilitates easier access to foreign literature. Additionally, for L2 learners who struggle with expressing complex ideas in their target language, AI can translate their L1 writings into L2. This prevents the learners from overly simplifying their opinions due to language barriers. Learners should ensure that the translation reflects their original thoughts. This promotes deeper engagement and better retention of linguistic elements because of the authenticity and relevance of their own translated ideas.

Conclusion

We found that the use of AI has made it possible to address serious and philosophical questions through foreign literature without significantly increasing the workload for teachers. We have also shown the features of the AI-generated questions. The AI text-generator summarizes the points first, then poses the questions. Teachers can select the types of questions that best fit the objectives of their class. It is possible that the effective use of AI by language teachers, combined with a human approach to guiding students, will enhance the quality and breadth of education.

About the Authors

Eric Cruz-Alvarado is a recent BA TESOL graduate from Hawai'i Pacific University. He plans to teach English in different parts of the world while connecting with local communities in his travels. He hopes to inspire students to achieve their goals and become the best versions of themselves that they can be.

Naoyuki Hamada is an English teacher in Japan at the high-school level. He is also a master's candidate in TESOL at Hawai'i Pacific University. His interests include effective and impactful English teaching in an EFL context as well as school management in the current AI era.

Appendix

ENGLISH SUMMARY GENERATED BY ChatGPT (2024)

In Chapter 20 of “To Kill a Mockingbird,” Scout and Dill encounter Mr. Dolphus Raymond, a man known in the town for his unconventional lifestyle. They find him drinking from a paper bag, and Dill is surprised to learn that it only contains Coca-Cola despite Mr. Raymond pretending otherwise. Mr. Raymond explains that he pretends to drink alcohol to give people a reason for his behavior that they can understand, as they wouldn't accept his true reasons. He shares his thoughts on the societal prejudices and the harsh treatment of African Americans.

After their conversation, Scout and Dill return to the courthouse to find Atticus in the middle of his closing argument for Tom Robinson's trial. Atticus delivers a powerful speech, emphasizing the lack of evidence against Tom and highlighting Mayella Ewell's motives for accusing him. He challenges the jury to see beyond racial biases and uphold justice.

Atticus's passionate plea leaves a strong impact on Scout, Dill, and Jem, who are witnessing the trial. As the chapter ends, Calpurnia approaches Atticus in the courtroom, suggesting an important development in the trial or its aftermath.

日本語のサマリー

第20章の「To Kill a Mockingbird」では、スカウトとデイルは、町で非常識な生活を送っているとして知られているドルフアスレイモンド氏と出会います。彼らは、レイモンド氏が紙袋から飲んでいるのを見つけますが、実際にはココ-Colaしか入っていないことにデイルは驚きます。レイモンド氏は、自分の行動の理由を理解できるようにするために、アルコールを飲んでいるように見せしていると説明します。その後、スカウトとデイルは、トム・ロビンソンの裁判のためにアティカスが行っている終結の議論の最中に裁判所に戻ります。アティカスは強力なスピーチを行い、トムに対する証拠の不足を強調し、マイエラ・エワールの告発の動機を明らかにします。彼は陪審員に、人種的偏見を超えて正義を貫くように挑みます。アティカスの情熱的な訴えは、スカウト、デイル、ジエムに強い印象を残します。彼らは裁判を見守っています。章の終わりには、裁判所でカルパーニアがアティカスに近づいている様子が描かれており、裁判またはその後の出来事についての重要な展開を示唆しています。

Note. The underlined part of the English text above corresponds to the underlined part of the translated Japanese text, but this Japanese translation is unclear. The English word “drink” includes the meaning of “drinking alcohol,” but the Japanese does not necessarily correspond to “drinking alcohol.” In this instance, the teacher needs to add “alcohol” in Japanese to the translation. Since AI translation can be incomplete as in this case, language teachers need to check AI outputs and can use AI’s errors as starting points for discussions with students as learning opportunities.