

## ESP for Creative Fields: Responding to Growing Needs in Japan

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### Abstract

This presentation sheds light on the use of English language in genres relevant to creative fields from the standpoint of ESP. In contrast to the abundance of ESP research and education in science, law and business, those in creative fields such as visual arts, traditional crafts and handicrafts are limited. However, rapidly growing waves of globalization and digitalization, coupled with a shrinking market and limited career opportunities in Japan, require creative artists to communicate across national borders and boundaries, to participate in creative communities, and to seek potential clients around the world. Based on our research and professional experiences, this presentation focuses on such growing needs in creative fields in general as well as specific needs of manga majors at a Japanese university. The presentation proposes teaching and learning materials and practices based on essential genres and concludes by pointing out the challenges faced and promising future directions.

*Key words:* ESP, creative fields, manga, needs, Japan

### I. Introduction

Over the past two decades, ESP (English for Specific Purposes) has significantly developed in terms of theory and methods as well as the purposes and fields it covers (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998). While extensive work has been done in science, law and business fields, work in creative fields has been limited. Thus, the English language curriculum in the EFL environment of Japan has not sufficiently responded to the specific needs of the creative community.

This aim of this paper is to shed light on the use of English language in genres relevant to creative fields from the standpoint of ESP. First, it will identify growing needs for English in creative fields in general as well as specific needs of manga majors at a Japanese university. Second, it will propose teaching and learning materials and practices based on essential genres. It will conclude by pointing out the challenges faced and directions to be taken amidst the growing needs for English in the creative community.

### II. Methodology

This research uses data obtained through several research methods, including observations in Kyoto and Osaka, informal interviews and group interviews and questionnaire surveys at a university. Informal interviews were conducted with artists and designers.<sup>1</sup> This paper also draws from our professional experiences: as a staff member in an architectural design office, working with artists and designers as an interpreter at a theme park and in other design projects, and teaching an English course for manga majors at a Japanese university. The group interviews and questionnaire surveys were conducted with these manga students between 2011-2014.

### III. Growing Needs for English in Creative Fields

In this paper, *creative fields* are broadly defined to include visual arts, traditional crafts and handicrafts,

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<sup>1</sup> We interviewed two manga artists, a professor of animation, a professor of manga production, an industrial designer, an illustrator, a traditional craft worker, an artist/illustrator and a professor of architectural design.

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based on both Japanese specificity and global trends (See, Behanc.net for the range of creative fields it covers). Many of our respondents do not actually use English in their work, but vaguely perceive English as a tool to increase their capabilities. Based on our findings, we have specified the following four major growing ‘needs’:

1. To communicate across national borders and boundaries;
2. To participate in global creative communities;
3. To seek potential clients or sponsors around the world;
4. To do business with clients or sponsors.

Note that these needs are clearly professionally oriented in contrast to the academic needs of international students of visual art studies at an Australian university reported in the literature (Basturkmen 2010). Unless they study abroad, artists and designers do not usually need to study in English. In addition, art and design courses in Japanese universities are generally more practically oriented with emphasis placed on developing artistic skills over art theories and English skills.

Recently, creative people are faced by rapid waves of globalization and digitalization even if based in Japan. For example, there are websites such as portfolio sites that are developing into global creative communities through which people can promote their work across national borders and boundaries. The work in the art community is often carried out on a project-to-project basis; artists, designers and technicians, are recruited as required for a particular project. A Japanese artist/illustrator who had participated in such a project found himself having to communicate with other team members located in different parts of the world via e-mail. Making requests was one of the challenges he faced as well as having to send an invoice to the project leader to be paid for his work. Artists and designers are often freelancers and as a result, they must be able to carry out business in the global market.

There are also factors in Japan which are pushing creative people to seek for an export market. First, the traditional craftwork industry is dwindling due to the shrinking domestic market as well as a shortage of successors. Some individuals and companies in this field are finding it difficult to survive. They are thus actively seeking new markets including export markets with new, modern designs (e.g. Nambu Ironware).

Second, while there are many colleges and universities offering course in arts and design, career opportunities are limited. Although this is not unique to Japan, art majors tend to show a low employment rate after graduation as many opt to work independently. Similarly, in what Japanese sociologists call an ‘M-shaped employment pattern’ (Iwai 2013), Japanese women tend to stop working after marriage or childbirth and seek jobs which allow them to work in a flexible manner, often working only part-time.

The recent handmade crafts (*tezukuri*, *teshigoto*) boom is changing the situation. Some handicraft fields, which have hitherto been confined to the private space, are becoming increasingly visible in the public space. For example, when women start a new business, they often turn their favorite pursuit into a career as an artist or designer (*sakka*), instructor, blogger, writer or vendor, which preceded a new trend in the U.S. (Matchar 2013).

This recent flowering of ‘handmade crafts markets’ (*tezukuri-ichi*) in Kyoto, Osaka and other cities in the Kansai district has rendered the presence of creative people visible. These markets are held once a month in places such as Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines or public parks, attracting many visitors from a wide area.<sup>2</sup> Non-/semi- professional people display and sell various handmade goods such as sweets, bags, clothes, hats, drawings, paintings, toys, soaps, illustrated cards, notebooks and seals. Some use these markets to launch their businesses. Being able to display their work across national borders and boundaries should help broaden their career opportunities even further.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, 42 handmade craft markets were held in Kyoto in January 2015 (Kyoto Bunka Suishin Inkai 2015).



Figure 1. A handmade craft market in Kyoto (Photograph by N. Watanabe, 2012). Each exhibitor/ seller rents a booth at a reasonable rate.

The progress of globalization has more directly influenced Japanese manga and animation, shifting them from a subculture in Japan to a global transculture (Berndt 2010). Many pirated versions are still disseminated in English and other languages as Japanese publishers and producers had not shown much interest in overseas markets. Recently, in response to their popularity around the world and to protect their copyrights, officially translated works are being offered. Seeing this as a bearer of ‘Cool Japan’ (METI), the Japanese government is now keen on protecting and promoting such a subculture or popular culture. Unfortunately, officially translated works have not yet be able to respond to the demand, and pirated versions continue to prevail.

Japanese-style manga works are also produced outside of Japan both by Japanese and non-Japanese artists. For example, a new, award-winning work titled *Golden Ring* was created through international collaboration between an Arab writer and Japanese manga artists based in Japan (Good 2009). Proficiency in English language should certainly facilitate such international collaboration.

Interestingly, both professional and aspiring manga artists are usually domestically oriented even though they are aware of the growing market outside Japan. On the other hand, since the time of the legendary manga artist Osamu Tezuka, foreign settings for the stories themselves are popular. To prepare for such materials, background research of collecting materials and/or doing fieldwork or interviews (Aoike 2005) are conducted, often with the help of a translator, interpreter and/or specialist. By identifying such broad needs in creative fields, it next becomes necessary to distinguish between what should be done by professional translators and what should be done by the artists themselves.



Figure 2. *Hamlet*, Act IV, a manga student’s work produced for *Manga Kamishibai* Production (2014).

#### IV. Handbook of Essential Genres

In response to these growing needs in various sectors of the creative arts community, we propose the compilation of a handbook of essential genres relevant to their general needs. The genres currently under consideration can be divided into three major categories: 1) genres associated with the receiving and

understanding of information in English; 2) genres used when communicating and presenting oneself and/or one's works through various media; and 3) genres involved in doing business with overseas clients or sponsors. The handbook, aiming to familiarize the user with such essential genres through project-based scenarios could include chapters such as those listed below.

- Introducing yourself to project team members
- Preparing your profile as an artist/designer
- Signing up at a portfolio site
- Describing your work
- Entering a design competition
- Applying for a grant
- Making a contract for a project

One of the proposed projects involves signing up at an online portfolio site such as Behance.net (<https://www.behance.net/>), which is an online platform where people in all creative fields ranging from architecture and animation to web design from all over the world can sign up and showcase their works. By signing up at a portfolio site like this, viewing arts in their field and uploading their own works, artists/designers can be exposed to new genres and other artists and potential clients.

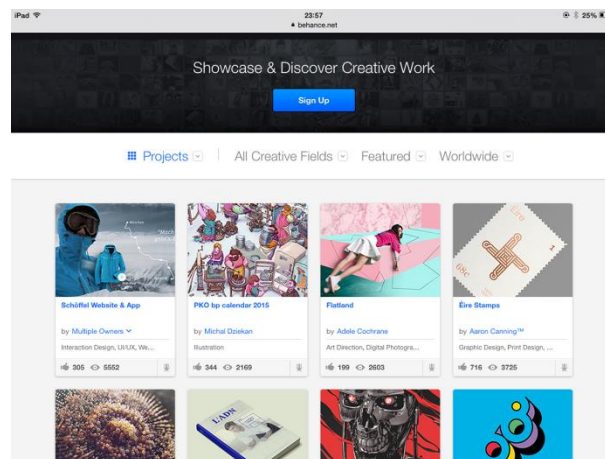


Figure 3. Behance.net, a portfolio site for artists and designers.

Through such a project scenario, the handbook user can become aware of genre specific features such as writing own profile as a creator, indicating project name and/or work title, and a brief description of the work.

## V. Specific Needs of Individual Creators

We also propose to address the specific needs of individual artists and creators, who display a myriad of styles and approaches in art and design. Here are some possible actions plans, which require further research and scrutiny:

1. Provide one-to-one or group instruction on specific needs such as a workshop on exhibition pamphlet production and effective artwork presentation.
2. Offer translation services for artists and designers through a website for translation. Translation services would be not just into English but also into other languages.
3. Offer courses in *English for Creative Purposes* at colleges or universities.

## VI. Conclusion

The waves of globalization and digitalization are impacting all peoples including those in the creative arts community. Their works are visual, seemingly transcending the need for communication via language. However, language does play an important role in supplementing and enhancing the visual quality of their work. Our interviews made it apparent that many felt becoming more competent in English language would expand their work opportunities. To respond to the language needs of the creative communities, we are trying to apply ESP principles and practices to pinpoint the essential genres in the creative fields as well as to come up with ways for creative people to function more actively in the global creative arts community. Further clarification of the general as well as specific needs of the creative arts community should help create a handbook of essential genres for the creative arts community and find other ways to offer support for their growing needs.

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