TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH NEWSPAPERS

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Abstract

The idea of reading English newspapers is appealing to many Japanese college students, though if they try it, they usually give up fairly soon, because they find it too difficult. However, if students learn something about how newspapers and newspaper articles are commonly organized, what vocabulary is commonly used, and so on, it is easier for them to read newspapers.

I begin introducing newspapers to students by discussing the advantages of reading them, giving them information about English newspapers available in Japan. I also give students advice on getting started reading, such as setting manageable goals for reading newspaper articles, choosing articles they are interested in, and reading the same type of article every day. I acquaint students with types of articles and their characteristics, headlines and their vocabulary and grammar, grammatical forms that they commonly find in news articles, and so on.

In this paper, I explain what I teach in reading classes using newspapers, and I suggest activities using newspapers to help students apply what they have learned.

Introduction

Though many Japanese college students are interested in reading English newspapers, they often find it difficult to do so. In talking to my students, I have found that some make an attempt to read English newspapers, but most

of them soon give up. Though it is true that it is not easy for students of English to read newspapers casually, another major problem that students have is that they have not been taught how to read English newspapers. I believe that if students learn how English newspapers are organized, how headlines are written, what vocabulary is commonly used in English newspapers, etc., they can read newspapers independently with only a little help from a dictionary. In my classes, I have students read newspaper articles, and they have enjoyed reading them.

There are a number of sources related to using English newspapers as material for language teaching. Some of these are directed to teachers who are interested in using such material. (For example, Baddock, 1983; Berman, 1980; Blachford, 1973; Boyle, 1983; Cathcart, 1975; Cheyney, 1971; del Giudice, 1974; Humphris, 1974; James and Lange, 1974; Redmonds, 1978; and Todd, 1969.) In addition, there are numerous textbooks, published both in Japan and overseas, for students to learn to read newspapers. Some of these are mainly collections of newspaper articles (or even specific types of articles, such as advice columns) often with exercises, and others are textbooks teaching students about the characteristics of newspapers and/or strategies for reading them. Examples of the former include Dobbyn (1971-1994), Miura and Kanko (1981), Kanashiki (1986), Koshida and Kawaguchi (1988), and Shimizu (1983). Examples of the latter include Asano and Kizuka (1982-1994), Kitao and Kitao (1988, 1991, 1992), Nakamura (1991), and Sugiyama and Suda (1994).

Since the early 1980s, I have been teaching students how to read newspapers more easily. Students subscribe to an English newspaper for a month and read various kinds of articles with the assistance of information that I gave them about newspapers. Though this practice lasts for a relatively short time, students come to understand what kind of information they can get from English newspapers, that the information was very useful and

intersting, and that it is not too difficult for them to read some articles.

In this paper, I will explain what I cover when I use newspapers to teach English and the kind of exercises that I think are useful to introduce students to various characteristics of newspapers and to help them read newspaper articles. The activities that are suggested can be done by students individually or in groups in the classroom.

Introducing Students to Newspapers

When I teach students to read newspapers, I begin by discussing why being able to read English newspapers would be useful to students of English, introducing the four English newspapers published in Japan, and giving students advice on getting started reading newspapers.

Reasons for Reading English Newspapers

There are at least three reasons that it is useful for students to be able to read newspapers. First, newspapers are useful as material for learning English. Second, students can obtain information, particularly about other countries, that is available only in English newspapers. Third, they have news available to them wherever they might travel. Fourth, they can see how people from other countries view Japan.

- 1) There are several reasons that English newspapers are good material for studying English. They use natural English as it is actually used today. They carry a wide variety of information, so that anyone should be able to find something of interest, and therefore they are motivating to students. Students can get information on many fields, including politics, business, sports, entertainment, the arts and music, education, and social trends.
- 2) From English newspapers, students can get more information about other countries, people and cultures, and more international news than they would in a newspaper published in Japanese. In Japan, there are many

articles in English newspapers that do not appear in Japanese newspapers. English newspapers carry many articles or columns reprinted from newspapers or taken from British, French, American or German news services, as well as other articles or columns written by non-Japanese. Students can get more international information than they would in a Japanese newspaper. Since these articles and columns reflect the views and values of non-Japanese people, students can learn about other cultures.

- 3) If students can read an English newspaper, they can find news when they are traveling to other parts of the world, as well as when they are in Japan. Throughout the world, twenty-five percent of the newspapers published are published in English (Merrill, 1984). Even in many countries where native English speakers are not a majority, or where English is mainly a second language, there is at least one English newspaper. In addition to those in Japan, some such newspapers include the Rand Daily Mail and the Johannesburg Star (South Africa), Korean Times, China Daily, Daily Times (Nigeria), East African Standard (Kenya), Jerysalem Post (Israel), Indian Express, Straits Times (Singapore), Standard (Thailand), Oriental Daily News (Hong Kong), United Daily News and Central Daily News (Taiwan), and Bulletin Today (the Philippines). Therefore, readers of English newspapers can read newspapers in many different countries.
- 4) Finally, students can read articles written about Japan and Japanese people, politics, and culture. Reading such articles helps students understand how Japan is viewed in other countries. It also helps them learn to explain Japanese culture to non-Japanese people.

Classroom Activities. Students can be asked to look for the various characteristics of newspaper mentioned above. For example, they can be asked to find articles and information about other countries, people and cultures, articles reprinted from foreign newspapers, and other articles written by non-Japanese people. Students can also be asked to look for

articles about Japan and Japanese culture and for articles that would probably not appear in Japanese newspapers. They can also be asked to look for articles that they think would be interesting. For each of these types of article, as appropriate, they can answer questions about how many they found, what topics they were about, and what countries they came from.

English Newspapers Published in Japan

There are four English papers published in Japan. They are *The Japan Times*, *The Asahi Evening News*, *The Mainichi Daily News*, and *The Daily Yomiuri*. All four are national newspapers. About 200,000 copies of these four English newspapers are published every day, and about half of these are read by Japanese people (personal communication, Satoko Nozawa, 1994). In addition, some newspapers published overseas, such as *USA Today* and *The International Herald Tribune*, are available in Japan, and you can subscribe to these or buy them in a few places.

Classroom Activities. Students can be assigned to look for English newspapers in Japan and find out what newspapers are available, where they were originally published (in Japan or abroad), how many pages they have, whether they have supplements, how much they cost, etc. They can also buy copies of an English newspaper and a Japanese newspaper on the same day and compare them to see whether they can find news articles on the same events.

Getting Students Started Reading Newspapers

In addition to reading newspapers in the classroom, I want students to read newspapers on their own, so when I start teaching them about newspapers, I have the students subscribe to a newspaper for a month. Their ability to read newspapers will improve even faster if they do some reading on their own. I give them a list of suggestions to help them started.

- 1) I encourage them to read at least one short article twice a day. I discourage them from trying to read a lot but recommend that they make it a habit to read something every day. If they set their goals too high, they tend to give up, but if they start out with a manageable goal, they can reach it every day. Gradually, as it becomes easier to read, students can increase the amount that they read.
- 2) I encourage students to choose articles that they are interested in reading. Reading articles that they are interested in is motivating to students, and one of the advantages of using newspapers to study English is that everyone should be able to find something of interest.
- 3) I encourage students to read the same type article every day at the beginning. They can, for example, follow a particular story that they are interested in over several days.
- 4) I encourage students to try to read without a dictionary, at least the first time that they read an article through, guessing the meanings of words that they do not know. If there are words that they still do not understand the second or third time they read, they may want to look up some of the words, especially if these words appear several times or seem to be particularly important to understanding the meaning of the story.
- 5) I encourage students to try to understand the article as a whole, even if they do not understand some parts. There will probably be some parts of a newspaper article that students do not understand exactly, but they should concentrate on trying to get an overall understanding of the article rather than worrying about details that they do not understand.
- 6) If students are having a lot of difficulty reading newspaper articles in English, I encourage them to read a story first in a Japanese newspaper and then in an English newspaper. This will give them some background knowledge that helps them understand the English better.

Homework

Students can be assigned, during the period of time they are working on learning to read newspapers, to read one or two short newspaper articles each day. They can be assigned to write down the headlines and one-or two-sentence summaries, either in English or Japanese, depending on the students' level.

What Is In Newspaper

It is also useful to introduce students to the type of information that they can find in newspapers—what sections they will find in the papers, what kinds of articles there are, and what the characteristics of different kinds of articles are. To make it easier to find different kinds of information, newspapers arrange articles according to their importance and classify them broadly according to their subject matter.

Some textbooks used in Japan to teach English using newspapers deal only with news articles. However, there are many other types of useful articles and other information, and students should be aware of them. These include feature stories, business and sports news, various types of columns, editorials, news digests, reviews, various announcements, ads, weather reports, TV schedules, business statistics, etc.

News Stories

News stories are articles about current events, including political and military events, crimes, and natural disasters. The news stories found in the newspaper on a given day usually occurred the previous day, or at least were announced the previous day. However, some news articles that appear in English newspapers published in Japan occurred two days previously. The most important news stories appear on the front page, and less important stories appear inside the paper.

Feature Stories

Another important type of newspaper article is the feature story. Feature stories can be about a person, a trend, a situation, etc. They are not necessarily tied to a current news event, though they may give background information about a situation in the news. In some cases, feature stories give useful information for readers' daily lives, for example, information related to health and safety. Feature stories are not found on the front page. There are usually several feature stories together on one page.

The Business Section

In addition to news articles and feature stories, all newspapers have a section with articles and information about business. This section includes news and feature stories related to trade, companies, new products, finance, and the economy; stock market reports; and exchange rates for foreign currencies.

The Sports Section

Newspapers also have sports news and features. The sports section includes news stories about sports events and other sports related news, rankings of teams and players, and so on. The sports sections of English newspapers published in Japan carry news of foreign sports such as American baseball, Japanese sports such as sumo, and international sports such as World Cup soccer.

Columns

Newspapers also carry columns. They are essays written regularly (daily, weekly, or sometimes every two or three days) on certain subject areas, giving the writer's opinion, informing the reader about a particular topic, answering questions from readers, etc. Columns often have a name and/or a

picture of the columnist. Several columns are often found together on one page. Some of the types of columns are personal advice columns, etiquette advice columns, food columns, and political columns.

Editorials

An editorial is a specific type of column. It expresses the views of the editors of that particular newspaper, usually on a political or social issue. Editorials are found on the editorial page, which has other political or social opinion pieces. The editorial page is usually the same page every day. Except for *The Japan Times*, English newspapers published in Japan use editorials translated from the Japanese edition. In English newspapers published in Japan, editorials from foreign newspapers or from other Japanese newspapers may appear on this page.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor are letters written by readers of a newspaper. They express opinions of the readers, usually related to information or opinions that have appeared in the newspaper. They generally appear either on the editorial page or facing the editorial page.

Reviews

Reviews are a particular type of column. In reviews, writers give their opinions about something. Most reviews are of movies or books. Generally, the writer summarizes the story and gives his/her opinion. In addition, restaurants, plays, concerts, art shows, and other events are reviewed. Readers use reviews to help them decide what movies to see, what restaurants to go to, etc.

Schedules and Cultural Events

Newspapers also have information about radio and television. They print radio and TV schedules every day, along with brief explanations of some programs. On the same page, there may also be short articles on such cultural events as art exhibits and concerts, or other articles related to entertainment.

Other

Newspapers published in Japan also have comics, classified advertisements, and weather reports.

Classroom Activities

Students can be asked to find the following in a newspaper:

- 1. News stories
- 2. Feature stories
- 3. Business news stories
- 4. Business feature stories
- 5. The stock market report
- 6. Exchange rates for foreign currency
- 7. Sports news stories
- 8. Sports feature stories
- 9. Columns
- 10. The main editorial
- 11. An editorial reprinted from another newspaper
- 12. Letters to the Editor
- 13 Reviews
- 14. Radio and television schedules
- 15. Comics
- 16. Classified advertisements
- 17. Weather reports

In addition to identifying different types of articles and information students can also be asked more specific questions, such as what other kinds of information they find in the business and sports sections, which of the feature stories and columns are about Japan and which are about other countries, what kinds of columns they find, what the editorial is about, what movies, books, etc., are reviewed, and what the letters to the editor are about.

How Newspapers Are Organized

After introducing the different types of articles and information, I explain to students how newspapers are organized, beginning with the front page.

Editors do not place information in a newspaper at random. Certain information is found in certain places. Newspapers are organized basically the same way every day. The same kinds of articles or information are usually found in the same places each day. The advantages of this is that it allows editors to include more information in limited space and that it allows readers to find information more quickly and easily.

The Front Page

The front page always has the most important news stories of the day, both international and domestic news. Among these news stories on the front page, three things indicate the importance of a story—the location on the page, the size of the type in the headline, and the number of columns wide it is. The most important story is usually in one of the upper corners, and other important ones are usually in the upper half of the first page. The larger the type in the headline, the more important the story. In rare cases, stories are so important that they have banner headlines—headlines across the entire width of the page. A less important indicator of the importance of a story is the number of columns wide the story is.

The Inside Pages

Less important international and domestic news appears after the first page. Domestic news usually immediately follows the front page, and international news follows the domestic news. Some English newspapers published in Japan have a page for news from the Asia/Pacific region as well. As mentioned above, there are also one or more pages of business-related news and sports-related news, entertainment, radio/TV schedules and information, features, reviews, etc. There is usually an index on the front page which indicates where each of these types of information are found.

Classroom Activities

Students can be asked to look at a newspaper and answer questions about how many articles there are on the front page, which seems to be the most important article and where it is located, what the three largest headlines are, and so on. They can also compare two or more English newspapers according to what articles they have on the front page and whether the most important article is the same. They can also compare the front pages of an English newspaper and a Japanese newspaper.

Headlines

Another topic that I cover with my classes is the grammar and vocabulary of headlines. Headlines help readers get an idea of what a particular article is about so that they can decide which articles they want to read.

Headlines are like one- or two-sentence summaries of the articles, but they are shortened because of limits on space. Certain short words are deleted, words are abbreviated, and short words are often used in place of longer, more common words. Headlines are written according to certain rules, which can be used to reconstruct what the summary sentence was.

Words Omitted from Headlines

Certain small words are routinely left out of headlines. For example, and is generally omitted from headlines, and is often replaced by a comma. In the headline, "Freezing Temperatures, Snow Hit Tokyo Again," and has been omitted between temperatures and snow and replaced with a comma. Other short words, including articles, be verbs, and pronouns are also commonly omitted. In the headline, "Dean says academic quality primary goal of law school," the has been omitted before dean, is and the before primary, and the before law school. If it were a sentence, it might read, "The dean says academic quality is the primary goal of the law school."

Verb Tenses

The verb tenses of headlines also differ from sentences. In headlines, the simple past tense is represented by the simple present tense. In the headline, "U.S. Asks Japan to Join in Space Project," the U.S. has already asked Japan to join the project, so as a sentence, it would be, "The U.S. asked Japan to join the space project." In the case of headlines in the present continuous tense, the be verb omitted. For example, the headline, "State surplus rising despite market slump," would be written, "The state surplus is rising despite the market slump" as a sentence. Headlines use an infinitive to indicate future tense. In the headline, "Kyoto Artists to Visit China," to visit indicates that this is something that the artists plan to do in the future. The participle form of a verb is used to indicate the passive voice. The headline "Tax Cut Plan Given to Study Council" would be rewritten as the sentence "A tax cut plan has been (or was) given to the study council."

Colons

Colons are used in headlines differently from their use in ordinary writing. Sometimes colons are used in headlines to give the source of information or a quotation. For example, "Study: Roads need fixing," indicates that the source of the information that roads need fixing is a study (of road conditions). In addition, people's names or official positions are sometimes used as the source of information or a quotation in the headline.

Abbreviations

Also, there are many different abbreviations that are used in headlines, many more than can be discussed here. Names of countries and other place names are often abbreviated, as are regions of the world, governmental and inter-governmental agencies, political parties, and other organizations. Some other common abbreviations are *intl* (international), *govt* (government), N-(nuclear), q'finals and s'finals (quarterfinals and semifinals), and m (meter).

Other

In addition, headlines use short verbs and nouns, some of which are not commonly used in ordinary speech or writing. Some of the common ones are boom (increase greatly or a great increase), nix (reject), eye (consider), hail (praise), stand and stance (position on an issue), pact (agreement; treaty), cut (decrease), and mull (consider).

In headlines, the name of a country's capital city may be used to mean country's government. For example, *Tokyo* would be used for *the government* of *Japan*, *Washington* for *the government of the U.S.*, and so on.

Classroom Activities

To study headlines, students can try to find each of the following in a newspaper:

- A. omission of "and," a be verb, or an article
- B. a simple present tense verb representing a simple past action/event
- C. -ing form without a be verb representing present continuous tense

- D. "to" with a verb representing future tense
- E. a participle form used for passive voice
- F. abbreviations
- G. the name of a capital city used to represent the government of a country H. short words commonly used in headlines (lists of such words are found in Kitao and Kitao, 1991 and Kitao and Kitao, 1992)

Students can also be given headlines (or they can choose headlines themselves) to be rewritten as sentences or to reconstruct headlines that have been cut up.

The Organization of News Articles

In addition, I cover the organization of news articles. It is easier for students to understand news articles in English if they understand how news articles are generally organized.

Bylines, Credit Lines and Datelines

At the beginning of a news article there may be a credit line, a byline, and/or a dateline. The credit line indicates which news service an article came from, if that was the source of the article. There are several major international wire services, including Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI) (the United States); Kyodo and Jiji (Japan); Reuter (Great Britain); Agence France Presse (AFP) (France); and Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA) (Germany).

A byline gives the name of the person who wrote an article. Bylines are not included on all news stories, however. They are generally used to reward good article or to encourage a young writer.

Datelines indicate the date that an article was written and its place of origin, that is, where the story was reported from. (The place of origin may not be the same as the place where the story occurred.) Many newspapers

today do not include the date the article was written.

Classroom Activities. Students can be asked to find various bylines, credit lines and datelines.

The Arrangement of News Articles

The general arrangement for a news article is an *inverted pyramid* arrangement, that is, it moves from the most important and general information to more specific and less important information. The purpose of such an arrangement is to allow the editor to cut information easily by cutting material from the end of the article.

The first paragraph of a news story is the *lead*. It includes the most important facts of the story. In the lead, students should look for the information who, what, when, where, why, and/or how (5W's and 1H), depending on what is important in the particular news article. (Since leads are brief, they do not usually include all six pieces of information.)

In addition to giving the most important facts of the story, the lead is supposed to interest the reader in the article. The lead, particularly the first phrase of the lead, should catch the reader's interest and attention and make him/her want to read on, for example, by mentioning the name of a famous person (who), a well-known place (where), or an unusual incident (what).

Classroom Activities. Students can choose or be given five articles and be asked to fill out the following chart with information from the leads. (Not every space can be filled.)

Headline What Who When Where Why How

1 2

3

4

5

Students can also be given articles in which the paragraphs are cut apart and be asked to put them in order.

The Grammar of Newspaper Articles

I also discuss some characteristics of the grammar of newspaper articles. Sentences in newspaper articles tend to be shorter than in ordinary written English, but with as much information as possible included in each sentence, allowing the writer to put more information in the limited amount of space available.

Writers of news articles tend to omit relative pronouns, often placing the words that would normally be part of a relative clause in front of the noun rather than after it. For example, a news writer would likely use labor union president John Doe rather than John Doe, who is president of the labor union. Writers also use noun phrases giving more information about the subject. For example, labor union president John Doe may be referred to later as the 46-year-old electrician. While both of these phrases refer to the same person, the second gives additional information—his age and occupation.

Similarly, news articles avoid using of forms and prepositional phrases. For example, a writer would use Los Angeles native rather than native of Los Angeles, labor-management relations rather than relations between labor and management, the country's unemployment rate rather than the rate of unemployment in the country, or a Tokyo-based company rather than a company based in Tokyo.

Specifying the source of information is important in news articles, particularly when the information is not general knowledge or is an opinion. This helps readers judge how reliable the information is likely to be. Therefore, reported speech is used frequently. Such phrases as "The Prime Minister said that...," "Government sources report that...," etc., are common. When the source is not specified, writers often use words like allegedly, reportedly, and supposedly.

With the exception of columns, reviews, and editorials, articles in newspapers are supposed to be objective. If an opinion is expressed in a news story, the writer should state whose opinion it is. This objectivity in news stories is the ideal for Western journalism.

Classroom Activites

Students can be asked to find examples of the following:

- 1. sentences where the relative pronoun has been omitted
- 2. more than one noun phrase being used to refer to the same person
- 3. omission of "of" or any other pronouns
- 4. sources of information being mentioned
- 5. words such as allegedly, reportedly, and supposedly

Conclusion

Using this information and these practice exercises, students can become familiar with English newspaper and comfortable with reading them.

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Appendix .

REVIEW EXERCISES

Year Dept. Number Name
Use a copy of an English newspaper and answer the following questions. If the question is not applicable (for example, if the type of article asked about in the question does not appear on that day), write "NA."

- 1. How many pages are there?
- 2. How many pages are taken up by news, business, sports, TV and radio schedules, and feature stories?

type	No. of pages	type		No. of pages
news		TV & radio sc	hedule	
business		feature stories		
sports	٠.			

3. What is on each page?

page	1	6	11
	2	7	12
	3	8	
	4	9	
	5	10	

- 4. What is the most important news story? Where is it? How many columns does it take? What percentage of the page does it take up? Does it have a photo?
- 5. What is the second most important news story? Where is it? How many columns does it take? What percentage of the page does it taken up? Does it have a photo?
- 6. How many news articles are there on the front page? How many of them are domestic news? international news?

Classify the news articles on the front page according to dateline, credit line, and whether they have a byline.

dateline credit line

with byline

without byline

- 8. Where is the index? What page do you find news articles on? business news? radio and TV schedules? sports news?
- 9. Where do you find editorials? columns? feature stories? information about the stock market?
- 10. Is the editorial reprinted from another newspaper? If so, from what newspaper? When was it originally published?
- 11. On what page do you find reviews? What is being reviewed? Is the reviewer Japanese or non-Japanese?
- 12. On what page do you find TV and radio schedules? What else do you see on that page?
- 13. On what page(s) do you find comics? How many are there?
- 14. On what page do you find classified ads? How many are there? What are they about?
- 15. On what page(s) do you find letters to the editor? How many are there? Were they written by Japanese or non-Japanese people? If any of the letters were written by non-Japanese people, can you tell what country the writer came from?

- 16. On what page(s) do you find reprints of articles? How many are there? What are they about? What publications do they come from?
- 17. Where do you find international news articles? domestic news articles? How many of each are there?
- 18. What are the three headlines, in order of size?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
- 19. Look for examples of headlines with the following characteristics, and fill in the chart with the page number, the headline, and the headline rewritten as a regular sentence.
 - a. "and" omitted and replaced with a comma
 - b. a be verb omitted
 - c. a pronoun omitted
 - d. an article omitted
 - e. a simple present tense verb that refers to a past event
 - f. an -ing form of the verb
 - g. "to" and a verb
 - h. a past participle used for the passive voice
 - i. three headlines with abbreviations for names of countries or regions
 - i. an abbreviation with an apostrophe
 - k. an abbreviation with a period
 - l. the name of a capital city used to refer to the government of that country
 - m. three other abbreviations
 - n. three short words often used in headlines

Page Headline Regular Sentence

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

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24.	Find one sentence w before the noun it		pronoun is avoided	by putting the noun phrase
25.				ubstituted for the name of a ation about that person or
26.	Find two examples a. b.	of sentences	where "of" is avoid	ded.
27.	Find a direct and a	an indirect que	ote.	
	a.			
	b.			
28.	How many feature Choose five feature Headline			ring chart. Author(s)
a.				
b.				
c.				· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
d.				•
e.				
29.	How many sports n Choose four sports	-		
	Headline	News or	Sport	Japanese or
		feature?		international?
a.				
b.				
c.				
d.				

- 30. Where can you find an editorial? What is the topic? Is the topic of local, national, or international interest? What is the editor's position on that issue?
- 31. Fill out the chart below with information about the columns that appear in the paper.

Page Column

Headline

Topic

Author

a.

b.

- c.
- 32. List the articles on the business page. How many of these are international?
- 33. What is the selling price of the yen against the dollar?
- 34. What was the Dow Jones average?
- 35. How many classified ads do you find? What are they?
- 36. Are there any foreign movies or other foreign programs on TV in the Kansai area? What are they? What channel are they on?
- 37. What subject is the advice column about? Is the person giving advice Japanese or non-Japanese? What is the advice given?
- 38. What topics do you find digests for (news, business, etc.)? How many individual stories are there in each digest?
- 39. What else do you find in this newspaper?