

# The Roles of Drama in English Teaching

## —Applications and Effects of “Stage Directions” in Neil Simon’s Plays—

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### Introduction

#### 1. Summary

At the initial stage of my research, “stage direction” of a play attracted my attention during the course of studying numerous components of drama education. “Stage direction” not only describes backgrounds and characters of a play, but also specifies the characters’ actions and their facial expressions. However, in spite of such important functions, not many people have paid their attentions to its role in regard to drama education. In this thesis, I have focused on stage direction and explained how drama techniques can be applied to English teaching.

I have picked up Neil Simon’s works that seemed to be the most suitable dramas for English language teaching. Neil Simon, who is still active in his career, is one of the most renowned comedy playwrights in the U.S. His dramas are full of Jewish humor, but they also express warmth and sorrow of the people. Additionally, in spite of the depth of his works, English expressions used in the plays are simple and easy to understand. Based on the above two points, I have discussed the possibility of applying his works to the teaching of English in Japan.

As mentioned earlier, my thesis is on the importance of applying drama techniques to ELT and the effects of drama education using stage directions, and I have also studied the possibility of applying Neil Simon’s works to drama education, and reviewed the previous studies on the application of dramas to foreign language education. Furthermore, I have explained the possibility of using drama education to develop “empowerment of life” which is the main pillar of new *Teaching Guide for the Japanese Course of Study* (issued by MECSST) as a part of human education.

## 2. Research Motivation

I have listed some of the reasons why I have come to notice the significance of applying drama education methodologies to ELT in Japan.

### (1) Contemporary Educational Problems in Japan

In Japan, there are a lot of problems in the field of education today. According to the collected reports from the frontline of education, teachers are faced not only with the degradation of students' academic abilities, but also with non-attendance, harassment, bullying, aggression, and other problems young generation face. Moreover, newspapers reveal that parents who should exemplify as the models for their children themselves are causing a lot of problems. Under these circumstances, teachers are required to have higher qualities than ever.

Specifically, poor communication skill is one of the major issues not only in schools but also in society. It can be said that teachers have similar problems as their students, and communication ability is one of the most important qualifications for teachers in recent years.<sup>1</sup> With respect to that English education, the necessity of *English for communication* has long been the major factor and this has been clearly stated in the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Though the teachers must show the good examples to their students, English educational community in Japan has depended on native speakers in teaching foreign language communication. Moreover, students have fewer opportunities to use English in daily lives. The situation has not changed for a long time. As a result, what is happening now is that many students are not good at speaking English unless they are attending the schools specialized in teaching English communication.

In view of the situation, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has modified its educational guidelines.<sup>2</sup> In these guidelines, the number of English classes per week is more than that of Japanese classes. Despite the increased amount of time for learning English, fundamental questions seem to have remained unsolved.

Taking these situations into account, learning drama education methods seemed to be effective both for developing communication skills and learning the value of our own culture. The need for drama education will be becoming increasingly important.

### (2) Structure and Function of Drama

As mentioned above, we expect Japanese students to develop their communication skills

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<sup>1</sup> Sano, "Eigo Kyoiku Jihyo: Eigo Kyoin no Shishitu to Kenshu," *Goken Journal* (5), p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, *Education Ministry Guidelines for Junior High School*.

both in Japanese and English. In this respect, I cite three features of drama structures: (1) the dialogue, (2) the body action and (3) the story.

To perform a play, three kinds of dialogues are required: the dialogue among actors, the dialogue between staff and actors, and the dialogue between performers and audience.<sup>3</sup> If we adopt these elements in the classroom, the three types of conversations are: the dialogue among students (performers acting their parts), the dialogue between students and teachers (performers and staff) and the dialogue between performers and audience (internal dialogue). The drama, from its nature, enables the performers to communicate with other people.

Communication consists of mental activities as well as verbal and body language. The key element to be noted here is that the body action is one of the core factors in English education.<sup>4</sup> Quite naturally, there are a lot of physical movements of expressions in drama. That helps students to perform on three elements (mental activities, verbal and body language) at the same time. Moreover, verbal activity entailing physical movements helps students to acquire what they have studied. It has been revealed, in the field of cognitive psychology, that memory is developed more efficiently when it involves physical movements.<sup>5</sup>

English plays give students an opportunity to use the language and to expose them to “language function.”<sup>6</sup> Practical language usage in everyday life is evidenced in the context of the play. In other words, as the drama scene reflects the situations of a real life, students can practice the language in the particular situation of a play. Additionally, it is easier for students to memorize words or idioms because they are related to the real world.<sup>7</sup>

Drama education, therefore, has various advantages over the current system of teaching English. So far, I have suggested that teaching through drama can develop communication skills, especially speaking ability. Other abilities are also needed to perform a play in a practical manner. For example, students need to read a play-script over and over, and understand the contents sufficiently. Furthermore, practicing enables them to have the opportunity to listen to their teachers’ pronunciation or to available audio-visual materials. Thereby, they naturally improve their listening skills. In addition, the process of speaking requires the creation of sentence structure as a part of brain activities. This practice enables students to develop their writing skills. Through the process of producing a play, the four skills of English can be improved

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<sup>3</sup> Hirata, *Engeki Nyumon*, p. 201.

<sup>4</sup> Sano, *Teacher’s Manual of English Play*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>5</sup> Masumoto, *Episode Memory and Cognitive Psychology with Actions*, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Sano, *Teacher’s Manual of English Play*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Yokoyama and Watanabe, *Memory, Thoughts, and Brain*, pp. 10-13.

simultaneously.

### **(3) The Roles of Drama in Teaching English in Japan**

As stated above, in view of the existing problems in Japanese schools, teaching methods that can improve English ability and promote emotional maturity of students is critical. Under these circumstances, drama education may be effective on the growth of both students and teachers, because it involves the communication activities both in Japanese and English. Most importantly, students enjoy peer editing and multi-educational learning process. As plays reflect a variety of elements in real life, we can also apply these drama techniques to other subjects. Drama production is a process that involves the whole school creating the harmonious atmosphere within the class and the school. This engagement may create a new educational style.

The implication of English education using drama on Japanese educational sites today is significant because it enables students to improve their comprehension ability as well as other English skills.

## **Chapter I. The Roles of Drama in Contemporary English Teaching**

### **1. Definition of Theater Education**

Various terms are used to express the teaching method using drama. “Theater education,” for example, is sometimes used in broader sense and at other times, to refer to specific category in much narrower sense. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the definition of the terms used in this thesis prior to the case analysis. In this thesis, the primary teaching method is referred to as “drama education.” The detail is reviewed at later stage in relation to the following quotation:

What is the drama? The word “drama” derives from “dran” in Greek, which means “do” in English. Quite often at the traditional education site, children memorize the script of a play and perform in front of the audience. “Drama education” in this book does not refer to such activities. As the origin of the term signifies, we define it as a form of the teaching method that emphasizes the learning process during a drama performance.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, based on the quote above, I define “theater education” as the educational activity related to drama in general. On the other hand, “drama education” here, means the educational activity using drama focusing on the advantage of this teaching method rather than

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<sup>8</sup> Kobayashi, *Drama Kyoiku Nyumon*, p. 10. (Translations are mine.)

dramatical performance.

## **2. Background of Theater Education**

### **(1) The Origin of Theater Education—Its Development in U.S. and U.K.—**

Theater education has been developed in several ways all over the world. In this section, I have reviewed the historical background especially in U.S. and in U.K. in order to find its roots.<sup>9</sup>

In the U.S., “creative drama,” one of the most popular methods of theater education, is characterized with five main features: (1) Improvisation without script (2) Stress on the acting process and not the final stage performance (3) Emphasis on educational purpose (4) Must be conducted by a teacher or a student leader (5) Enjoyable. This new method was born from the New Education Movement<sup>10</sup> and educational theater movement for children<sup>11</sup> in the 1920s. Until then, drama was used in the education where children compete in the performance of a play. In the new educational movement, children were the center of an education, and educators found an actual value in drama activity itself. Although the studies of drama education were suspended during the war, “the workshop of all kinds of arts” in 1950 by US government became the major turning point. Through the event, the importance of drama in education was once again recognized. This movement triggered many researchers to publish various books and journals related to creative drama. In the 1960s, numerous universities taught “creative drama,” and their research and practice have continued in various parts of the country until now. Later, as the movement expanded, the researchers established the network which enabled them to study the development of drama education in other countries. In the 1990s, these scholars recognized the educational benefits in applying this methodology to other curriculum. In the 2000s, workshops of theater education centering on creative drama have been held extensively which resulted in further development of theater education to this day.

Meanwhile, in the U.K., where the theater education was born, “Drama in Education (DIE)”<sup>12</sup> is a term very well known to the public. From the success of Shakespeare, a genius in the world of drama, the cultural value of theatrical performance was evaluated quite highly in the U.K. In other words, compared to other countries, the cultural background of the U.K.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 17-22.

<sup>10</sup> Generic name for educational movements in the West in the late 19th and early 20th century.

<sup>11</sup> This educational movement was begun by Alice Minnie Herts. She established theater for children in New York City. She found dramatic intuition in children will arise from the process of making drama.

<sup>12</sup> One method of drama education. In U.K., it means participatory learning, in which students understand matter through drama activity.

enabled the development of the theater education. The “new educational law” passed in 1944 triggered the U.K. to advance this educational method, resulting in the movement towards child-centered education away from the traditional and mechanical way of teaching. Due to this change, considerable efforts were put on the development of creativity and group work, contributing to the advancement of theater education. In 1950s, children’s art had gained recognition in Europe as well as the U.S. At that time, Peter Slade, the pioneer of theater education in the U.K., advocated the new educational method called “child play.” This is said to be the first form of theater education. Brian Way<sup>13</sup> inherited his theory and pointed out that drama education method can be applied to education in general. He also mentioned the importance of “family practice” by children through acquiring the experiences by playing a drama. Although these two researchers applied child play to drama education, Dorothy Heathcote<sup>14</sup> came up with a new form of drama education called “teacher in role.” This method allows a teacher to play a role in front of children and he involves them in the “story.” For example, a teacher appears in a class wearing a sailor hat so that students use their imaginations to turn the whole classroom into a ship. The teacher uses this setting to work out teaching activities. This method known as Drama in Education (DIE) spread throughout the world. DIE was initially taught in a classroom as one of the subjects. Later, the method was adopted into English textbooks as one of the national curriculum. Today, there is a movement to apply DIE to other subjects or to the educational activities outside school.

As mentioned above, theater education evolved in these two countries originated from different roots. However, the vital element here is that the theater education stemmed from the idea of a child-centered education and that it was highly appreciated as the general method used for human education. Today, it is one of the important themes for teachers to foster young people and develop a well-balanced character. In this sense, theater education is an appropriate and essential method that can be adopted in Japan.

## **(2) “Drama” for Language Teaching**

In the previous section, we discussed the history of theater education in a broad sense. Next, I would like to confirm the drama education related to second-language teaching in this section.

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<sup>13</sup> He wrote *Development through Drama* in 1967, which is so-called introductory book of drama education for many years.

<sup>14</sup> She devised new drama education called “Teacher in Role,” in which teacher acts as certain character and involves students in drama activities.

It was in the nineteenth century that people started to use drama for language teaching. Sano Masayuki, who is an English educator in Japan, pointed out some of the merits of using English plays. Following are the five points asserted by Sano that are also identified by other researchers:

1. Strengthening the psychological factor in communication
2. Expertise of the language activity for “listening” and “speaking”
3. Understanding and expressing English through nonverbal elements
4. Understanding and expressing English in a particular situation or context
5. Enjoying English learning<sup>15</sup>

As for (1) strengthening the psychological factor in communication, language learners tend to be shy or to hesitate to speak the foreign language in public. They are too keen in making grammatical errors or pronunciation mistakes. This, in fact, is critical issue in terms of students’ psychology. With drama, students have the opportunities in the form of “rehearsal.” At the same time, they can work and share the experiences together with other students learning the same foreign language. Through these activities, their psychological fear in communication can be eradicated. On this point, Richard Via,<sup>16</sup> one of the prominent figures, who disseminated the drama education in Japan, pointed out the advantage of drama education as “an improved sense of confidence in the student in his ability to learn the target language.”<sup>17</sup>

With regard to (2) the advantage of the “listening” and “speaking” language activities, a drama script uses everyday language, which enables the students to practice them repeatedly through the rehearsals and performances. They listen to the correct pronunciation of their teachers, audio materials, or their friends. In addition, they are able to learn the pronunciation through practicing. We can say that drama education is the interaction between listening and speaking. To this, Gill mentions, “. . . learners get to hear and produce the sounds of that language more authentically and in a more wholesome fashion than they would in a regular class.”<sup>18</sup> Additionally, these activities enable the students to improve their reading and writing skills using the script. However, the remarkable property of drama education is the former one.

On (3) understanding and expressing English through nonverbal elements, noteworthy is

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<sup>15</sup> Sano, *Teacher’s Manual of English Play*, pp. 11-15. (Translations are mine.)

<sup>16</sup> Drama director in Broadway. He had taught drama in Japan for three years and worked out new teaching style based on that experience, which is called “Via Method.”

<sup>17</sup> Via, “English through Drama,” *English Teaching Forum*, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Gill, “Using Drama Techniques to Encourage Oral Interaction.”

that communication is not only about speech. For effective communication, body actions including facial expressions, gestures and postures play important roles. The same phrase can mean completely different things depending on the actions of a character. In drama education, these body expressions are crucial elements. Hall, who practices drama education at University of Hamburg in Germany, described the importance of body expressions as follows:

Since teaching cannot fail to involve interaction and communication between teachers and pupils, and is in turn a reflection of a wide range of emotional and intellectual responses to concrete situations, a familiarity with the complexities of non-verbal signs or cues and the way these supplement, augment, or substitute for verbal communication, is as important as a grasp of structure and syntactic complexity.<sup>19</sup>

In this way, with drama, the students can learn not just a language but the live language including bodily expressions.

As for (4) understanding and expressing English under a certain situation or in a particular context, the situation of everyday life has a great impact on the pronunciation and definition of a particular word. These environmental circumstances affect the intonation and connotation of the same word to mean different things. In this aspect, drama incorporates a particular situation (i.e. background) and lines are written in certain context to reflect the environment. For this reason, students learn how to understand and express the appropriate words under a certain situation.

In regard to (5) Enjoying English learning, many students consider curriculum of school as less enjoyable and they often encounter the difficulty in learning English. English is a communication means, which is the ultimate goal for a lot of students. Nevertheless, if they do not appreciate the language, it is impossible for them to reach this goal. The opportunity to learn English with friends through drama becomes their motives. Regarding this point, Gill said:

The feedback I got from my students was that, other than the enjoyment they got from the course, they were more motivated to learn English than they ever had been before. Some of my colleagues, too, commented that they had never seen the students articulate as well as they were articulating, and that the students seemed to have come out of their shells and appeared more confident when speaking in English.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Hall, "Drama in English Language Teaching."

<sup>20</sup> Gill, "Using Drama Techniques to Encourage Oral Interaction."

As we know from his experience, drama education seems to fascinate the students and make them enjoy studying English. The reasons behind this may be the peer editing with friends, the interesting contents of a drama, etc. Whatever the reason may be, drama can inspire many students to learn English harder.

We discussed the five merits of drama education, but there are more advantages to this. It is risky to think of drama education as the panacea to all problems in language teaching,<sup>21</sup> but we can anticipate that drama education can bring a new light in language education. However, many problems exist to introduce the drama education in the Japanese classroom. This will be discussed in the following section.

### **(3) Problems Resulting from the Background**

The first issue is the difficulty of carrying out “step-by-step lesson planned for the final stage.” Theater education in Japan centers the performance of a play in front of the audience on the final goal of drama education, as suggested by Sano Masayuki and Richard Via. However, considering the limited number of classes used for this purpose, it is very difficult for teachers to continue the drama practice until the very last stage while teaching the textbook in parallel. Considering these negative factors, as Sano mentioned, drama education has to be geared by the whole school rather than just as a teaching method of a subject such as English.

The second problem is the lack of interest on drama and shortage of drama instructors. To study to issue, we conducted the survey on drama to sixty students in the university. The survey revealed that about 70 % of students had never appreciated a drama, and about 80 % had no experience with drama activity in class or club.

As is clear from this result, compared to the U.K., foreign theatrical culture was not grounded on Japanese soil. Consequently, the number of English teachers who are engaged in drama activity is very small. In cases where professional assistance is not available, or if both teachers and students have poor understanding of a foreign theater, drama education in Japan may be difficult. In order to solve this issue, the use of audio-visual aids may be effective. A number of movies are made from Simon’s play. Even if children are not interested in drama, many of them like to watch movies or dramas on TV. This advantage helps teachers to attract children’s interest toward dramas. Furthermore, audio-visual material can be a substitute teacher in a certain aspect. Teacher provides screen image and students try to imitate. Or, they can repeat lines in a scene. Through these activities, the students are able to develop their interests on

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

drama in a natural way.

The third issue originates from the poor expression of emotions by Japanese in general. It is often said that Japanese tends to hide his or her emotions from others. The exaggerated body action used by many Western people is not used by Japanese. Such body action, in the case of Japanese culture, tends to be small and unnoticeable. A sudden request to perform or to speak in front of the people, often, results in poor performance by Japanese. These tendencies seem to be the unique characters of the Japanese culture. For effective drama education, these attributes must be taken into account. Regarding this issue, Takeuchi Toshiharu, who was a drama instructor at local high school, analyzed these tendencies and said:

Children's "body" is gradually brought toward "deep sleep." . . . They will become good robots for teachers; otherwise they come to be apathy. They do not want to do anything with the body closed. How should we do so that such children or the young break the ice with their body, correct the distortion, and touch others without feeling fear? This is what I have fumbled in the past. The delight when we contact with others must be sinews of human conditions, I think.<sup>22</sup>

In Japan, discipline and courtesy are more emphasized at educational site. As Takeuchi points out in the above, such tendencies may result in the suppression of a body and that drama can play a vital role to harmonize the mind and tense body of the students. Drama is a place where children can actually manipulate their bodies.

In this situation, warm-up exercise before the drama activity is important to have effective drama education. For example, pair the students and tell one of them to lie down on the floor. Instruct the other student to hold up his or her arm or leg. Initially, the student who is touched by the other student may feel the tension. Try to soften his tension by supporting him or her results in the gradual relaxation of their bodies. "Jumping-rope" is also another enjoyable warm-up. The secret of this exercise is not to use a rope. Two students use their imagination to swing their arms in circle as if they have a rope. Other members come in the circle and jump the imagined rope. The virtual jump-rope exercise does not entail any fear or accident. In addition, the exercise gives the students the opportunity to act by using their imagination in a natural way. This preparatory exercise helps the students to involve themselves in the drama activities, but the instructor must lead them on a gradual basis.

Above problem must be considered in order to effectively apply the drama education. "Stage

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<sup>22</sup> Takeuchi, *Karada, Engeki, Kyoiku*, pp. 9-10. (Translations are mine.)

directions,” that plays the instructive role in the actual drama performance, has a great impact on the efficacy of drama education, and it is the key in achieving successful results. In the next chapter, the drama, suitable for drama education, is selected and the effectiveness of “stage directions” is reviewed.

## **Chapter II. Effectiveness of Drama Education—Focusing on a Play by Neil Simon—**

### **1. The Summary of *The Sunshine Boys***

In this chapter, I have used the play, *The Sunshine Boys*, by Neil Simon<sup>23</sup> and apply on drama education. *The Sunshine Boys* was premiered in the Broad Hurst Theatre in 1972. This mega hit play ran over 500 performances and was made into a film in 1975. The play is the story of two aging comedians, Willie Clark (Frank Mularo) and Al Lewis (Don Edelman), ex-vaudeville duo called “the Sunshine Boys.” Other characters include Ben, Willie’s nephew, and his nurse. This two-act play has four major elements that can be used for drama education.

First, English used throughout this play is easy-to-understand. The story of *The Sunshine Boys* proceeds with the conversation between Willie and Al. The play begins with a dialogue between Willie and his nephew Ben. Latter half of the play mainly focuses on the conversation between Willie and Al, an experienced duo, who lead the scenes with the rhythmical dialogue. Majority of the dialogues takes place in the daily lives of the characters. Consequently, the words and expressions used are not so difficult. There are some difficult expressions that are new to the students but these phrases can be guessed from the context of the dialogues. This is the feature of a drama that expands the number of alternatives for the teachers to select the text that is appropriate to the level of his or her students.

Second point is the moral lesson taught by this play. The main theme of this play is “aging,” which is an unavoidable phenomenal process to all human beings. However, the play does not reveal the main theme clearly but describes the warm feeling among the family members and friendship between Willie and Al. The play features the bright side and darkness inside human psychology.

Third point is the advantage of having various audio visual (AV) materials. When we use drama for teaching English in the classroom, these AV aids play an important role in helping students in various aspects. AV materials are quite efficient for students to learn English and

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<sup>23</sup> Most famous comic play writer in the U.S. He describes so funny characters and dialogue that audience cannot stop laughing at them. His representative works are *The Sunshine Boys* and *The Odd Couple*.

students tend to enjoy the materials. Moreover, it also reduces the burdens of the teachers. In regard to this point, most of Simon's works had been made into films. They are readily available and therefore, can be used with the original scripts.

Fourthly, similar to other Neil Simon's comedies, his sense of humor shines in *The Sunshine Boys*. Although the play describes the sorrow of the characters, their actions, backgrounds and scripts are all expressed in humorous ways. Lines and actions of Willie, Ben and Al who are misled by Willie's words and funny dialogues between Willie and Al, all contribute to the laughter of an audience. However, the essence of the humor is conveyed with the actions and without the performance, the scene of humor is lost, unless you become the actor yourself.

From these factors, I have selected *The Sunshine Boys* as the play suited for drama education to teach English in a classroom. Plain English and a sense of humor help the students to enjoy the play and enhance their study motivations. In addition, the students not only enjoy the play. This work makes them to think what life really means to them and enables them to find out underlying emotions of human minds. From the view point of teachers, sufficient reference materials are helpful to conduct their class sessions.

Noteworthy is the sense of humor in Simon's plays. His humorous scenes are influenced by his Jewish background. In the following section, I would like to clarify this point before discussing the main theme of this thesis, "stage instructions."

## **2. Jewish Humor Seen in *The Sunshine Boys***

Before discussing on humor in Simon's plays, I will briefly outline the story of *The Sunshine Boys*.

The main characters are Willie Clark and Al Lewis. They were a duo-vaudevillian called "the Sunshine Boys" for forty-three years. They had already retired from the world of entertainment, but happened to meet each other again. The play progresses focusing on their present lives and the people around them.

Act one starts from Willie's daily life. He holds tightly on to his past glory. He is now old forgetful man, but still clings on to show business. He claims to his nephew, Ben, that he is still a capable actor who can work in the world of television (TV) programs. One day Ben tells Willie a surprise. It is an offer of a TV program to revive the duo-vaudevillian "the Sunshine Boys." Willie is excited to hear the news at first, but he refuses the offer because he has to perform with Al who opted to leave show business, which led to the breaking up of the act. Ben's effort to persuade him to accept the offer finally succeeds and Willie decides to meet Al again. On the day he meets his

old partner, Willie again refuses the offer but Ben ignores him and leaves the two old veterans alone in the room. Willie and Al begin to talk to each other but again conversation end up in an argument. In the end, they decide to accept the offer for the sake of their families. However, the rehearsal ends up in failure.

Act two starts from a rehearsal of the TV program. Although Willie and Al try to practice according to their script, they start to argue with small things and suspend the rehearsal. Al gets so frustrated that he pushes Willie's chest with his finger and spits in his face, which Willie thinks it is the most hateful act every done by a man. Willie burst out his anger using nasty words. At last, Ben and other staff try to stop them. However, Al leaves the studio but Willie's rage heightens until it reaches the limit resulting in a heart attack.

Two weeks later, Willie is in the hospital with his nurse. Ben visits him on every Wednesday as usual and he suggests that Willie retire from the show business. Ben gives him two choices: whether to live with Ben's family or to go to the Old Actors' Home for retired actors. Ben also asks him to meet Al again. Al is worried about Willie and calls Ben every day. Willie is reluctant but he finally agrees. Willie hears from Al that he has decided to go to the Old Actors' Home, the same place where Ben had suggested. The play curtains up the scene making the audience imagine the future lives of these characters. Sadao Yamamoto comments:

All of us have to confront the final stage of "life" but the problem lies in how should we spend the rest of our lives and what do we experience in old age? Neil Simon presents such serious subject through the conflict between two characters in a humorous comedy.<sup>24</sup>

As explained by Sadao Yamamoto, the framework of *The Sunshine Boys* is structured by his sense of humor which is associated deeply with Jewish culture. What, then, is Jewish humor? Regarding the relationship between the Jews and humor, Ugaya states as follows:

The Jewish people views humor as an effective tool for the human relationship. . . . There is an old Jewish saying, "When you are hungry, you should sing a song. When you are sad, laugh." It is true that laughing releases the tension when you are down and depressed. To Jewish people "humor" was the tool to overcome their fear and release them from the stress of discrimination from others.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Yamamoto, "Interpretations of Neil Simon's Play," *Gendai Engeki* 6, p. 39. (Translations are mine.)

<sup>25</sup> Ugaya, *Atama ga Yokunaru Yudayajin Jokushu*, pp. 3-4. (Translations are mine.)

As we understand from this statement, to Jewish people, humor is a tool to help them to cope with adversity. In society, it serves as the enzyme to create good human relationships, reducing the friction that comes from discrimination. The Jews have been challenged to overcome hardships for decades and centuries. Most of them had scattered around the world and they had acquired the skill to survive by turning their adversities into a life with humor. In Simon's works, we can find these Jewish humors. This sense of humor at times harmonizes the relationship between Willie and Ben while at others, covers the sadness of old Willie. It also mediates the friction between Willie and Al, who hate each other like cat and dog.

Jon Brokering explains on Jewish humor in Simon's plays by analyzing his works. He mentions:

Considering that he has written nearly thirty plays until now, there are few works in which Jewish humor appears. However, he makes use of Jewish humor slightly for his many plays. . . . It is the appeal of Simon plays that he assimilates Jewish humor into his works very well.<sup>26</sup>

In Simon's plays, Jewish humor plays an important role. Comical scenes in his dramas stems from this sense of Jewish humor. Brokering points out six characteristics: view on fate, irrationality, irony, personalities of the characters, Jewish psychology and Jewish way of relationship.<sup>27</sup> In the play, *The Sunshine Boys*, three of these characteristics: (1) irrationality; (2) irony; (3) Jewish way of relationships are evident.

(1) A Jewish proverb, "A stick has always two ends," reflects the element of irrationality that characterizes Jewish humor. Such humor arises from the paradoxical views.<sup>28</sup> We can find this type of humor in *The Sunshine Boys* in the form of satirical excuse by the characters. For instance, when Willie fails the TV commercial audition for potato chips, he argues with Ben in the following lines:

WILLIE. (*That hurt*) I couldn't remember the lines? I COULDN'T REMEMBER THE LINES? I don't remember that.

BEN. For the Frito-Lays potato chips. I sent you over to the studio, you couldn't even remember the address.

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<sup>26</sup> Brokering, "The Comedy of Neil Simon," *American Drama* 8, p. 4. (Translations are mine.)

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 4-22.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

WILLIE. Don't tell me I didn't remember the lines. The lines I remembered beautifully. The name of the potato chips I couldn't remember . . . What was it?

*(The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 312)*

In this scene Willie complains to Ben for not bringing the TV job. Ben replies back that his uncle could not even remember the lines at the previous audition. Willie is hurt by this. Angrily, he strikes back by saying, "The lines I remembered beautifully. The name of the potato chips I couldn't remember . . ." Sarcastic but funny, although Willie is trying to hide his weakness that comes from his age. Illogicality produces the humorous but sad scene of old Willie in the following lines:

WILLIE. I don't need money. I live alone. I got two nice suits, I don't have a pussycat, I'm very happy.

BEN. You're *not* happy. You're miserable.

WILLIE. *I'm happy!* I just *look* miserable!

*(The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 315)*

Here, Willie and Ben argue on the new job. Willie is reluctant to accept it because the job is a TV special that features the former legendary vaudevillian and that he has to reunite with his former partner Al, who had left him after quarrel. Ben mentions about money, but Willie just says, "I do not need money because I am happy now." However, the reality is that Willie lives in a cheap apartment, searching the job through auditions but without any success. To Ben, he is no different from a lonely old man like Al. Ben explodes with anger to say what he really thinks. Willie counterattacks by saying, "That just looks so." These lines reveal his inner feelings Willie has towards Al who lives with his family (e.g. jealous). On the contrary, there is a scene that features the comedic humor:

BEN. (*Amazed*) You mean to tell me you haven't spoken to him in eleven years?

WILLIE. I haven't *seen* him in eleven years. I haven't *spoken* to him in twelve years.

BEN. You mean you saw him for a whole year that you didn't speak to him?

WILLIE. It wasn't easy. I had to sneak around backstage a lot.

BEN. But you spoke to him onstage.

WILLIE. Not to *him*. If he played a gypsy, I spoke to the gypsy. If he played a lunatic, I spoke to the lunatic. But that bastard I didn't speak to.

*(The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 317)*

Willie explains how “the Sunshine Boys” broke up. Ben is really surprised to hear that Willie and Al have not seen each other for eleven years and they have never talked in for more than a year even during their legendary vaudevillian career. Ben asks him, “But you spoke to him onstage.” In response, Willie quibbles by saying, “Not to him. If he played a gypsy, I spoke to the gypsy. If he played a lunatic, I spoke to the lunatic.” The scene reflects on the Jewish proverb, “A stick has always two ends.” These illogical but humorous lines do not just insults the character, but they produce laughter. The secret to comedy is illogical explanation and sarcasm.

(2) Mild irony is one of the noted features of Jewish humor.<sup>29</sup> We can see them in various scenes of *The Sunshine Boys*, for example, the following lines:

BEN. Did you know his wife died two years ago? He’s living with his daughter now, somewhere in New Jersey. He doesn’t do anything anymore. He’s got very bad arthritis, he’s got asthma, he’s got poor blood circulation—  
WILLIE. I’ll send him a pump. He’ll outlive *you*, believe me.

(*The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2*, 321)

Here, Ben explains the health condition of Al and he tries to persuade Willie to perform together on the stage. Ben attempts to tell that Al is in bad condition. Willie ironically replies, to “poor blood circulation,” “I’ll send him a pump.” There are scenes where Ben, in turn, sarcastically criticizes Willie about his illness:

WILLIE. I’m sick. I woke up sick today.  
BEN. No, you’re not.  
WILLIE. What are you, a doctor? You’re an agent. I’m telling you I’m sick.  
BEN. What’s wrong?  
WILLIE. I think I got hepatitis.  
BEN. You don’t even know what hepatitis is.  
WILLIE. If you got it, what’s the difference?

(*The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2*, 326)

In this scene, Ben visits Willie to warn him not to get in trouble with Al. Willie tries to avoid the meeting by saying he is sick. Ben asks him what kind of sickness he has but Willie without giving any thoughts mentions that he has a liver problem. Then, Ben says bluntly, “You

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

don't even know what hepatitis is." Willie is even clever than Ben. He avoids the straight forwarded answer and says, "If you got it, what's the difference?" The ironic dialogue between Willie and Al is as follows:

WILLIE. . . . You like a cracker?

AL. (*Sips*) What kind of cracker?

WILLIE. Graham, chocolate, coconut, whatever you want.

AL. Maybe just a plain cracker.

WILLIE. I don't have plain crackers. I got graham, chocolate and coconut.

AL. All right, a graham cracker.

WILLIE. (*Without turning, points into the kitchen*) They're in the kitchen, in the closet.

(*The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 333 - 334*)

In this scene, after Ben goes to work, leaving Willie and Al alone, they have the tea in an uneasy atmosphere. Willie asks Al if he wants crackers. Al asks for the plain crackers but Willie says he does not have. Al decides to choose graham cracker as Willie said. But to this, Willie sarcastically tells Al to get them by himself. Jewish people often use these kinds of ironical expressions. However, the irony not only projects the negativity but also produce the humor. It is a kind of word game.

(3) To Jewish people the relationship is to take advantage of the other person using various tools.<sup>30</sup> Characters in Simon's plays think they are spiritually stronger than other people. They tend to enlist the sympathy and criticize or speak ill of others, thereby provoking the anger of other characters. Somewhat obtrusive and pushy attitude and psychological game creates humorous scenes. This is evident in the relationship between Willie and Al. Following scene is one of the examples:

BEN. What are you wearing? What is that? You look half-dressed.

WILLIE. Why, for him I should get *all* dressed?

BEN. Are you all right? Are you nervous or anything?

WILLIE. Why should *I* be nervous? *He* should be nervous. I don't get nervous.

(*The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 325*)

Willie wears a blue double-breasted suit over pajamas with a handkerchief in his chest

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

pocket. It is the time to go to the prior-meeting for the TV special. Ben sees the funny attire of Willie and asks him. He replies back, trying to humiliate Al by all means. Willie has a stroke during the rehearsal but still he does not want to show his weakness:

WILLIE. (*Breathing hard*) I don't need a doctor. Don't get a doctor, I don't trust them.

BEN. Don't talk, Willie, you're all right. (*To the NURSE*) Somebody get a blanket, please.

WILLIE. (*Breathing fast*) Don't tell him. Don't tell him I fell down. I don't want to give him the satisfaction.

(*The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 367*)

In this scene, Willie does not want to tell Al what happened to him especially right after their argument. Even when he is in a serious condition, he does not want to lose. This relationship between the two characters also applies to the following Brokering analysis:

Neil Simon uses various methods to create the plot. He often uses two conflicting characters who hate each other. . . . Simon, by pointing out the weakness of each character, dishonors their reputation. He releases them in the "cage" like the two wild animals. He, then, observes what happens to them.<sup>31</sup>

Willie and Al are set free in the confined "cage." Audience observes them from outside and laughs at how they insult each other, argue and get heated up. Simon does not just leave them fighting. He prepares the ironic way of ending that the two characters, although always arguing on the surface, end up in the same home for the aged people, signifying the friendly ties.<sup>32</sup> Jewish ironic humor is depicted in the last scene.

As described above, Jewish humor is evidenced in all parts of Simon's plays. *The Sunshine Boys* is one of them. It is one of the attractive elements of this play that heightens the quality of this play. Jewish humor is born from the long history, experiences and religious background. Simon's plays enable the audience to encounter the different culture automatically. No Jewish characters actually appear on stage. However, it is obvious that humor in his plays is based on Jewish culture. This proves that "humor" is one of the tools to catch the heart of the people across the border. Regardless of its background culture, "laughter" is a powerful device to attract the people around the world and make them happy.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19. (Translations are mine.)

<sup>32</sup> Kurokawa, "Neil Simon no Kigeki no Kouzou," *American Drama* 8, p. 31.

### 3. The Importance of “Stage Directions” in Simon’s Works

In this section, I will discuss Simon’s play focusing on stage directions of the play by Neil Simon as the subtitle shows.

Stage directions of a play are instructions such as the characters’ actions and movements that reflect the psychological mind, the situation of the scene, lighting, music and effects, etc., inserted between the lines. In Japanese, it is called “To-Gaki,” which was derived from Kabuki, where the characters’ movements and expressions are dictated after the phrase “To + action.” “To-Gaki” was initially meant for instructing only body actions, but gradually the term acquired a broader meaning. On the other hand, English term, “stage directions,” as mentioned above, meant overall stage instructions. However, Elizabethan dramas in Western Europe did not have any written stage directions. Lessing in Germany, for the first time, wrote “stage directions” in his play.

The common factor among these two terms (To-Gaki and stage directions) is the actions of the characters. Playwrights use stage directions to give instructions to the actors and actresses. It is one of the means to train actors to become the ideal characters writers expect in their drama. In this aspect, stage directions are in fact very useful tools for education, especially in teaching foreign language.

In this context, Simon’s plays have four advantages: (1) scripts are simple and clear, (2) many different types of stage directions are included, (3) basic human emotions are expressed, and (4) easy to understand feelings through the actions.

(1) “Simple and clear” is the one of the features of Simon’s works. The actions written on the stage directions are simple and easy-to-understand. The descriptions of the characters and its settings are clear and simple although there are difficult vocabularies. The sentence structure is very well written in an easy-to-understand style.

(2) Different kinds of stage directions can be applied in various teaching methods. In *The Sunshine Boys*, the stage directions are given to describe various situations including the stage settings, characters and body movements. Many different kinds of stage directions appear in the play and this enables the teacher to select for each class depending on the level, and its applications may be diverse.

(3) Simon’s dramas feature the most basic emotions of man. Simon describes “humane” characters who express joy, anger, sadness and happiness. Simon expresses the feelings that we experience in our daily lives through his comedy. As described in *The Sunshine Boys*, the joy of Willie when he gets a job, anger of Ben towards Willie, sadness of Al thinking about his age, and

humor created by arguing Willie and Al, all are expressed in comedy touch, a special spice called humor.

(4) Easy-to-understand actions that reflect emotional feelings help the students to develop their emotional senses. Many actions in Simon's play reflect the complex psychology of the characters. Thinking about these psychological factors enables the students to foster their emotions and prepares them to understand the feelings reflected by the body actions.

As discussed above, educational value found in the stage directions of Simon's dramas is big. Let's look at the stage directions of *The Sunshine Boys* in detail. Stage directions can be broadly divided into two main types: stage settings and characters. I have analyzed these two areas using act one. Main characters are former vaudevillians, Willie and Al, his kind nephew Ben, and the actor playing the role of a patient in their once famous "Doctor's Sketch."

*At rise, the TV is on, and the banal dialogue of a soap opera drones on. In the leather chair sits WILLIE CLARK, in slippers, pajamas and an old bathrobe. WILLIE is in his seventies. He watches the program but is constantly dozing off, then catching himself and watching for a few more minutes at a time. The set drones on and WILLIE dozes off. The tea kettle on the stove in the kitchen comes to a boil and whistles. WILLIE's head perks up at the sound; he reaches over and picks up the telephone.*

*(The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 303)*

This is the second part of the very first stage directions. In the first part, the location of Willie's apartment and background (time and place) are described. As described above, the curtain goes up and Willie Clark appears on stage. His appearance reflects a lonely old man. He dozes off watching a soap opera. He picks up the phone when he heard the boiling kettle whistle. This mistake reflects the sadness of a lonely old man in a humorous way.

This stage direction can be used as a warm-up at the beginning of a class. Students imagine the stage setting to act and present it to the others. Teachers may choose to give a simple quiz by showing some pictures of furniture (e.g. a TV set, slippers, pajamas, old bathrobes, etc.) for students to write down the corresponding English words. Willie's character may be discussed in the class. These activities enable students to be interested in learning English.

WILLIE. What happened to Part Two? I missed Part Two? *(He drinks his tea as Part Three continues and the banal dialogue drones on. WILLIE listens as he shuffles toward his chair. The TV set, which is away from the wall, has an electric plug running from it,*

*along the ground and into the wall. WILLIE, who never seems to look where he's going, comes up against the cord with his foot, inadvertently pulling the cord out of its socket in the wall. The TV set immediately dies. WILLIE sits, then looks at the set. Obviously, no picture. He gets up and fiddles with the dials. How could his best friend desert him at a time like this? He hits the set on the top with his hand) What's the matter with you? (He hits the set again and twists the knobs futilely, never thinking for a moment it might be something as simple as the plug. He slaps the picture tube) Come on, for Pete's sakes, what are you doing there?*

*(The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 304)*

In this scene, Willie pulls the TV plug out of the socket by mistake while walking to the chair. He does not notice it. He watches the TV with no image and thinks it is broken. He pounds on TV and asks the apartment manager to repair it. The stage directions produce the comical actions of Willie. The lines are short but the humorous movements of the characters enable the students to enjoy the acting with ease.

To play the role exactly as dictated by the stage directions is effective in helping the students to identify the meaning of a particular English vocabulary by guessing from the lines. Discuss how Willie reacts in this particular situation in a group or pair. Through these activities, they are able to learn how to interpret the meaning of a word from the context. Let them perform after reading the English script allows them to better remember what they learned from acting.

BEN. *(Crosses to the table with the shopping bag)* You feeling all right?

WILLIE. What is this, Wednesday?

BEN. *(Puzzled)* Certainly. Don't I always come on Wednesday?

WILLIE. But this is Wednesday today?

BEN. *(Puts his bag down)* Yes, of course. Haven't you been out?

WILLIE. When?

BEN. Today. Yesterday. This week. You haven't been out all week?

WILLIE. *(Crossing to him)* Sunday. I was out Sunday. I went to the park Sunday.

*(The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 306)*

Here, Ben visits Willie. The stage directions describe the action and facial expressions. The frequent short stage directions and lines make the play easy-to-understand and to memorize the sentence structure with ease.

This scene is appropriate for conversational practice in pairs. As a rehearsal, students may be grouped in pairs to act out the scene. Changing the situations or lines may be effective for

students to learn the language. For example, the day Ben visits or what Willie does on Sunday could be changed. Conversation includes many interrogative sentences, which helps students to improve intonations that Japanese are not good at.

AL. *(From outside)* You ready?

WILLIE. *(Yells)* I'm ready. Knock, knock, knock! *(AL knocks three times on the door)*  
Come in. *(We see and hear the doorknob jiggle, but it doesn't open. This is repeated)* All right, come in already.

AL. *(From outside)* It doesn't open—it's stuck.

WILLIE. *(Wearily)* All right, wait a minute. *(He shuffles over to the door and puts his hand on the knob and pulls. It doesn't open)* Wait a minute. *(He tries again, to no avail)*  
*(The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 343 - 344)*

In this scene, Willie and Al decide to show their performance on a TV special for their family. They start to practice their once famous “doctor sketch.” Stage directions describe the characters' positions on the stage, their actions and facial expressions. But the rehearsal does not start for a while and they start to talk each other over the door. These funny scenes provoke laughter.

Action and background are clearly described and students can imagine the scene with ease. This stage direction can also be used for peer editing in pairs. One of the students plays Willie's role and the other Al's. The classroom door could be used. If acting is difficult for the students, group the students in fours, with two playing the part without any lines and the other two reading from the script. This scene features the daily lives of the characters, which enables the students to perform the acting with ease and it is enjoyable for them. This scene can also be used to motivate students who are not good at speaking the language.

As the above examples of stage directions reveal, Simon uses many different stage directions to produce a variety of expressions in the play. As you can see the lines get longer as the drama proceeds from one to four. This allows the teachers to select appropriate material for their students depending on their language ability.

Moreover, stage directions in *The Sunshine Boys* describe various emotions: joy, anger, sadness and happiness. Here, I would like to explain with the focus on *Act Two*.

WILLIE. Open wider and say “Ahh.”

PATIENT. Ahh.

WILLIE. Wider.

PATIENT. *Ahhh!*

WILLIE. (*Moves with his back to the audience*) A little wider.

PATIENT. Ahhh!

WILLIE. (*Steps away*) Your throat is all right, but you're gonna have some trouble with your stomach.

PATIENT. How come?

WILLIE. You just swallowed the stick. (*The PATIENT feels his stomach*)

(*The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 353 - 354, Underline is mine*)

In this scene, Willie and Al are rehearsing the “doctor sketch” in the studio. “Doctor” played by Willie tries to open the patient’s mouth using the “ahh stick” and repeatedly asks him to open his mouth wider. Willie turns his back to the audience (refer to the underlined section). Willie “drops” the stick into the patient’s mouth by mistake (actually he hides it secretly from the audience). The patient does not notice but just asks why when the doctor, Willie, says that he will have a stomachache soon. This humor in the “doctor sketch” is produced with two movements: “turning his back” and “patient touch his stomach.”

“Ahh” is repeated in this dialogue. This word is easy to say even if the student is not good at pronunciation. Therefore, this scene may be used for voice training prior to the overall performance rehearsal. The patient’s voice becomes louder requested by Willie. The exercise will relax the students before the actual performance.

WILLIE. (*Breathing hard*) I don’t need a doctor. Don’t get a doctor, I don’t trust them.

BEN. Don’t talk, Willie, you’re all right. (*To the NURSE*) Somebody get a blanket, please.

WILLIE. (*Breathing fast*) Don’t tell him. Don’t tell him I fell down. I don’t want to give him the satisfaction.

(*The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 367*)

Here, Willie and Al start a quarrel during a rehearsal of the “doctor sketch” as usual. Then, Willie has a heart attack. Even in an emergency, he tries to pretend to be strong in front of Al. His anger is expressed in the following lines.

Students can work on this scene in pairs. This scene is quite serious and it may be difficult for the students to play. They need to understand the lines in depth and act them in an emotional way. By playing the role seriously, the students can memorize the lines more easily.

BEN. All right, I feel a lot better about everything.

WILLIE. And what about you?

BEN. What do you mean what about me?

WILLIE. (*A pause; looks away*) I won't see you no more?

BEN. Certainly you'll see me. As often as I can . . . Did you think I wouldn't come to visit you, Uncle Willie?

WILLIE. Well, you know . . . People don't go out to New Jersey unless they have to.

BEN. Uncle Willie, I'll be there every week. *With the Variety*. I'll even bring Helen and the kids.

WILLIE. *Don't bring the kids!* Why do you think I'm going to the home for?

BEN. You know, this is the first moment since I've known you, that you've treated me like a nephew and not an agent. It's like a whole new relationship.

(*The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 379*)

This is the scene where Willie and Ben talk about their future at the hospital. In the past Ben's kindness was bothersome to Willie. However, he is now weak, losing his confidence because of his sickness. He shows his true feeling to Ben. He asks Ben whether they can meet with each other even after he goes to the home. In response, Ben happily mentions, "It's like a whole new relationship."

This scene may also be used for drama activities, initially in pairs or groups. Especially important may be the discussions after the drama activities to deepen the understanding of the whole play. It enables students to develop their ability to understand the implications hidden between the lines by understanding in depth the Willie's emotional changes through interpreting his lines.

AL. (*Calmly*) You know something, Willie. I don't think we get along too good.

WILLIE. Well, listen, everybody has their ups and downs.

AL. In forty-three years, we had maybe one "up" . . . To tell you the truth, I can't take the "downs" any more.

WILLIE. To be honest with you, for the first time I feel a little tired myself. In a way this heart attack was good for me. I needed the rest.

(*The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 386*)

The scene implies the approaching of the climax of the drama. Here, Al visits Willie at the hospital and they start to argue again. However, they suddenly stop fighting and open up their hearts to reveal their true feelings, calm and honest. Looking back at their old glory, they confront

the reality of getting old.

This scene also can be used for group or pair activities as well as class discussions to deeply understand this play. After the acting practice, students may discuss specific themes. Discussions on how Willie and Al feel or on whether they can lead a happy life, etc. may be interesting. They may be poor old men on the surface but their power to survive in any kind of situation is conveyed to the audience. By reviewing the two characters and exchanging their opinions on Willie and Al, students can develop their views and broaden their mind to understand from different perspectives.

WILLIE. Well, you know me, I gotta keep busy . . . What's with you?

AL. Oh, I'm very happy. My daughter's having another baby. They're gonna need my room, and I don't want to be a burden on them . . . So we talked it over, and I decided I'm gonna move to the Actor's Home in New Brunswick.

WILLIE. (*He sinks back onto his pillow, his head falls over to one side, and he sighs deeply*) Ohh, God. I got the finger again.

AL. What's the matter? You all right? Why are you holding your chest? You got pains?

WILLIE. Not yet. But I'm expecting.

AL. (*Nervously*) Can I get you anything? Should I call the doctor?

WILLIE. It wouldn't help.

AL. It wouldn't hurt.

(*The realization that they slipped accidentally into an old vaudeville joke causes WILLIE to smile*)

(*The Collected Plays of Neil Simon Vol2, 387*)

This last scene is picked up from the climax of the play, a continuation from previous lines. Willie and Al talk about their future. Willie is in the situation where he has to decide whether to live with Ben's family or to go to the Old Actor's Home. He decides on the latter but he does not want Al to know. His pride forces him to say that he has to keep himself busy. Al, on the other hand, tells Willie that he will go to the Old Actor's Home, not to trouble his daughter and her family. Al is desperate trying hard to be a nice grandfather. As a matter of fact, the Old Actor's Home is the same facility where Willie will go. Willie realizes they will end up in the same place. He sinks back onto the pillow to admit he lied. However, "the Sunshine Boys" never ends up with such a miserable situation. Willie notices their vaudevillian skill came back during their conversation and with a little smile he anticipates their future.

The ending scene wraps up the whole story. Students may share their impressions with

each other. They may also play the role of Willie and Al to understand how Willie feels when he sighs and smiles. This scene reveals various emotional feelings of the characters, that is, joy, sadness and slight hope for the future. Dramatization may be effective in experiencing the feelings.

As mentioned above, stage directions in Simon's dramas can be adopted in English teaching in the classrooms with various applications. The main reasons are that they are written in a clear and simple manner and that a variety of instructions enables students to express various human emotions. As such stage directions are found in various parts of the play, Simon's stage directions may be applied effectively to develop students' English ability in the field of ELT.

## **Conclusion**

We have discussed the role of drama in English education focusing on stage directions in Neil Simon's Plays, particularly *The Sunshine Boys*.

Overview and objective of this thesis are explained in the introduction. The main theme of my thesis is: (1) contemporary educational problems in Japan, (2) the structure and function of drama and (3) the roles of drama in English teaching in Japan. In the modern world, the demand of developing English communication skill is increasingly becoming important. The role of drama, which involves conversation as the core element, is the key to the language education in this aspect. From this viewpoint, I would like to suggest the incorporation of drama education in the language teaching as one of the methodologies, at the same time as one of the tools for integrated education to develop the general quality of the students.

In chapter one, I have defined the terms related to theater education in the first part. I have, then, discussed the history of theater education on the following three points: (1) the origin, (2) the role of drama as a language teaching tool and (3) potential issues evolving from the historical background. I have also pointed out the importance of mainly emphasizing on the activity and not on the performance. This enables the drama education to be incorporated in the school curriculum in line with the other subjects, and not as a separate, special event such as the annual play performance. Historically, drama education is quite active in U.S. and U.K. as I have introduced the developmental process of this educational method in two of these countries. The advantages of using the drama education in language teaching, the main theme of this thesis, are explained. Based on these backgrounds, I pointed out some of the problems of adopting the drama techniques in English teaching in Japan.

In chapter two, in search of the effect of using Neil Simon's plays in drama education, (1) summary of the story of *The Sunshine Boys*, (2) sense of humor found in the play and (3) stage directions, its applications and role were explained. The main reasons why *The Sunshine Boys* is selected are: simplicity and clarity of English, and morality behind the story in addition to its popularity. I have touched on the Jewish humor in the second section. Stage directions, the main theme of this thesis, are discussed in detail by citing from *The Sunshine Boys* and the methodologies of adopting them in drama education.

As mentioned above, the value of drama in teaching English in the contemporary educational world is substantial. This is mainly because most dramas are written in the form of "living" language used in the daily lives of the people and the play involves the human relationship and the interaction of the characters. The stage directions, as mentioned earlier, have the role to explain the characters' movements. These directions enable the students to actively participate in the performance with live action and movements as compared to just reading the lines.

Neil Simon's plays are full of rich humors. Laughing never stops whenever we read them. I picked up *The Sunshine Boys* in this thesis. The play is not only humorous but it features the heavy topic of the meaning of life. Simon's work is a key to the new drama education, which not only applies to English teaching but also to education in general.

Lastly, I would like to touch on my experience of practice teaching at junior high school, where I met drama education for the first time. The exercise teachers used in performing DO IT TALK (Unit learning process focusing on conversation) was to pair the students and make them memorize the skit on their textbook. In the next class there was recitation test. In the very first class, students practice for ten minutes. The test was conducted on the following class. The teacher prepares the props and each student freely uses these props to recite their part with body movement of the characters they play. Student scores high grades for good performance. Students seemed embarrassed but most of them performed it quite well without referring to their textbook. "Audience," in this case is the teacher and students. But the most importantly, they enjoyed the presentation and gave applause to the performers, regardless of the quality. Through this experience, I was able to realize the potentiality of drama education for English study. The students are in live action to recite their parts with body movement and involve in the dialogue with the partner.

At the same time, I was able to experience the differences between the skills students are good at and those they are not. From this practice training I learned that many students prefer to

study by just copying what teachers write on the blackboard or pronouncing/reading single words. On the other hand, many of them found it difficult to write freely on a blank sheet or speak/read the sentences. In this aspect, drama may be the tools to fulfill these gaps. As we have seen, drama education is closely related to developing four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. This advantage can be used. Give what the students prefer by placing their favorite learning activity at the core of a class and place others around the center. I would like to use *The Sunshine Boys* to present some of the cases.

Show the students to watch *The Sunshine Boys* DVD with subtitles. Then, group (pair) the students to choose their favorite scenes. And let them find the lines of the scenes they select from the script. Tell them to write it down on their notebook which will become their original script book. They can write their comments, notes or definitions of the vocabulary or translation. Let them practice the scene using their notebooks and finally, the recitation tests. These activities incorporate all of the four skills. Most students like to create their originals. This original book will be their textbook. This may further results in the active participation as compared to those created by the faculties.

Class room activities limited to stage directions may be designed and planned. For example, students copy the opening stage directions from the blackboard, the same kind of play script notebook as above. Do not simply start the practice yet. It is important to give them sufficient time to image Willie. Students may draw the image of Willie, simply because many children prefer drawing a picture. Different images of pajamas and slippers are expected from these drawings. Next step is to understand the contents. Allow them sometime to check the definitions of the words and decode the sentences so that they can understand the scene. Let the students play the role by imitating Willie's movements. For example, the scene he starts to doze off or being surprised at the ringing phone. This scene has no lines, so the students may write the new lines considering the situation using their imaginations (cf. "I'm sleepy," etc.). Stage direction specifies the setting and movements. As these stage directions specify quite lot of situations without any lines, students' creativity stimulates their imagination.

In addition to the above points, there are two advantages of Simon's play: motivation and simple movements to simulate. A lot of teachers may find the difficulty to attract students' interest in their classes. The best way to arouse the interest of the students is to effectively use the humor created by Neil Simon. Laughter of the university students who watch the Simon's play echoes the classroom. The humor comes from Simon's unique characters, their movements and lines. His sense of humor is universal and entertains both adults and children. The laugh

Simon creates in his plays is accepted by the people of all ages and cultures. The same effect as that of university students is anticipated on junior high school students as well.

In addition, textbook used in a classroom usually does not have any stage directions, only the lines of the characters. When I had the opportunity of practice teaching, junior high school students were confused in creating and shaping the action when they practiced their parts for “DO IT TALK” training at first. Students gradually learn how to act using their body movements with the help of teachers, but they cannot image the action of the characters they play initially. In this respect, stage directions contribute to the practice. They give a specific “instruction” to the students without the teachers’ involvement. It is one of the strengths of drama education to teach not only a language but also paralinguistic features as well as body language and facial expressions.

For these factors, it is my sincere hope that drama education method will spread and expand the possibilities, not only in the area of language training, but also in fostering the characters of a student which is the most basic part of “human education.”

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