

YouTube and the Value of Scripted Reading Recordings on PowerPoint: Going beyond perceived boundaries

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Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

Your playing small does not serve the world.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine as children do.

It's not just in some of us; it is in everyone.

And as we let our own lights shine,

we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear,

our presence automatically liberates others.

(映画より引用)

怖いのは、自分が未熟だと感じることではない。

本当に怖いのは、自分には計り知れないほどの力がある、と知ること。

本当に怖いのは自分の暗い部分ではなく、明るい部分。

小さくまとまっていたって、意味がない。

周りの人が気まずい思いをしないように
自分を小さく縮こませることはない。

私たちは、子供が自然にそうするように、そもそも輝ける存在。
一部の人だけではなくて、みんなが輝ける存在。

そして、自分の中の光を放てば
周りも自然に輝けるようになる。

自分を、その恐怖から解き放てられれば、
そこにいっただけで、周りの人をもその恐怖から解き放てられる。

(訳は筆者による意識)

(もとは Marianne Williamson という著述家・講演家の詩の一部だそう。)

<https://gamp.ameblo.jp/premierlinks/entry-10750817524.html>

Abstract

In this action research paper, the author explores the effectiveness of technology in foreign language classes. More specifically, the author will be examining dysfunctional practices of conventional English presentations, where many EFL learners often lack eye contact, facial expressions and gestures. Typical in-class presentations are often void of any heartfelt desire to provide meaningful information in an engaging manner. At the end of this project however, author's students produced 4-6 minute recorded, scripted, English presentations demonstrating that they understood how to focus on meaning, pronunciation, self-reflection, pauses, and the importance of humor.

This study merely attempts to highlight minor tweaks that can be easily implemented to create conditions which may result in more efficient and optimized language learning environments.

Introduction

In the past couple decades, advances in technology have made computer programs, apps and online website services easily accessible to anyone with a computer or a smart phone. Students do not have to wait seven days before they can use English. It is now feasible for students to do speaking, listening, reading and writing activities online from the comfort of their home. This is a great advantage for teachers since they now have additional tools besides traditional textbooks and CDs. One such tool that most students have experience with is PowerPoint. Initially, the author's main goal was simply to get students to spend more time speaking and listening to English outside of the classroom. In order to develop their fluency in English, students needed more chances to analyze their strengths and weaknesses when they are speaking English. One method in which to do so was to have them record themselves speaking in English on PowerPoint.

Method

For this initial research into pros and cons of recording scripted readings, the author has followed the guidelines of action research. As defined by Mills (2003), "Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular school operates, how they teach, and how well their students learn. This information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practices, effecting positive changes in the school environment (and on educational practices in general) and improving student outcomes and the lives of those involved" (p.5).

The author was also partially influenced by the concept of 'brain-friendly' lessons by Helgesen and Kelly (2015). This framework highlights the advantages of English language teaching and positive psychology in regards to examining how students

actually learn. One of the most important elements in this model is to create a non-threatening learning environment with meaningful material that allows students to go beyond their perceived boundaries in English output.

Project

For this project, students were shown a sample video on YouTube of a native speaker introducing his hometown in England. They were then asked to do the same for their own hometown. The target audience was not their teacher or classmates but instead future non-Japanese neighbors who want to know more about local Japanese towns. Before summer vacation students were instructed to take photos and write scripts describing important pros and cons of their hometown. Scripts were then partially corrected by their instructor. Students practiced reading their scripts and then recorded their scripts at home.

After the sixth week, students brought in their PowerPoint presentations with their embedded recorded voices for everyone to watch and evaluate. Finally, at the end of the term, students were given the option to upload their presentation to YouTube. This YouTube option created a different sense of urgency since the students' work would now be accessible to the rest of the world. At the end of the project, students were given a short survey and were also asked to write a one page reaction essay in English and Japanese about their hometown PowerPoint/YouTube project.

Note of caution: For teachers/students who are willing to contribute to ever-growing content of videos on YouTube some safeguards had to be taken. Students were not allowed to use their real name, address and photos of people. Additionally, before uploading any information created by student the author got written approval from students.

Literature Review

Over the years, there has been a lot of research on the merits of teacher and student self-observation (SO). This literature review will briefly highlight some of the earlier research that focusses on: ‘aha’ moments, critical incidents, communicative competence, Computer Mediated Communication, audio blogs and the value of repetition.

In regards to (SO) for teachers, Dr. Thomas Farrell at the KOTESOL International Conference urged the attendees to “at least once” record your teaching performance. Richards defines the importance of (SO) as “the observation, evaluation, and management of one’s own behavior” (Richards, 1990 in Farrell, 2014). While Miller expands upon the concept of (SO) to the acronym of CIA. C for change, I for insight, and A for awareness. These are just some of the benefits which can emerge from deeply reflecting on one’s practice whether you are a teacher or student.

Brookfield defines a critical incident (CI) as “any unplanned and unanticipated event that occurs during class, outside class, or during a teacher’s career, but is “vividly remembered” (Brookfield, 1990 in Farrell, 2014). Both as instructors and in the case of our learners, we want to structure classes so that there are chances for creativity, exploring and (SO) which will hopefully lead to ‘aha!’ moments of inspiration.

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) technology was introduced into the field of foreign and second language teaching in the late 1980’s. (Warschauer, 1996) and Chun (1994) reported how CMC environments helped English-speaking learners of German to develop their interactive competence through writing which could be gradually be transferred to the students’ speaking competence as well. (p. 29).

Swain and Lapkin (1995) emphasized the importance of giving students more chances to create output, which would lead to more self-observation and fluency. Teachers could increase output from learners by having learners record, listen, evaluate and edit their own recorded work.

Hsu, Wang and Comac (2008) including Sun (2009) introduced audio-blogs in ESL and EFL classes. By the end of the study, students had a small personal library of recorded blogs through which they could review and track their own progress. Researchers in both studies mentioned that students had a great sense of achievement at the completion of the project.

Brown (2012) in an ESL class setting, used voice recordings and self-assessment where students listened to native speakers' recordings from a variety of English speaking countries and then recorded themselves by reading the same scripts they had listened to. Students listened to their own recordings and analyzed what they had to focus on during their next recording. The recording project was viewed as a success in enhancing students' intelligibility. In terms of attitudes and perception of improvement the post project questionnaire revealed that the students appreciated the extra opportunities of oral output outside the classroom and felt that their pronunciation did indeed improve. Lord (2008) and Brown (2012) however both found that while there was indeed improvement in students' performances, the factors that contributed to the change in pronunciation remained unclear.

As noted above, a number of researchers have shown that repetition, self-observation, voice recordings and audio-blogs help to boost motivation, improve attitudes regarding pronunciation and getting student to take more responsibility for their own linguistic development. Despite all of the technology that is readily available, it is important to emphasize that just making recordings, does not by itself, guarantee that students will become better speakers.

Student Profile

The participants in this study were all 1st year students at Obirin University. The 1st group of 18 students are business management majors (BM) while the 2nd group of 20 students are liberal art majors. (LA) The English classes are streamed according to the students' performance on the (Casec) test in April. The BM group are Level one

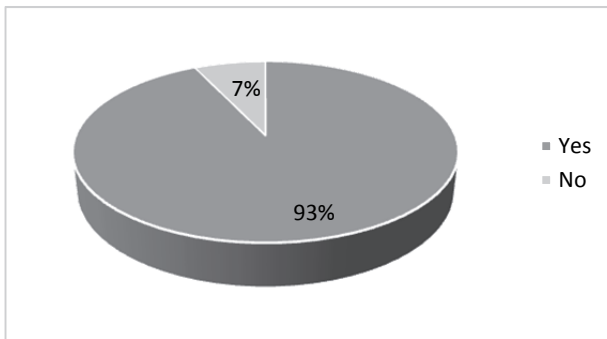
students while the (LA) group are in the higher scoring group of level 2. Based on their 2nd Casec scores in November 2017, the following figures demonstrate their proficiency in English. ToEIC average score: 285, Toefl average score: 364, Eiken level 3 (13 people), Eiken level Pre-2 (1 person) and Eiken level 4-5 (1 person). Both groups of students have a listening and speaking class once a week for 180 minutes with the author. Each term students must have two speaking tests which counts as 40% of their grade.

Data

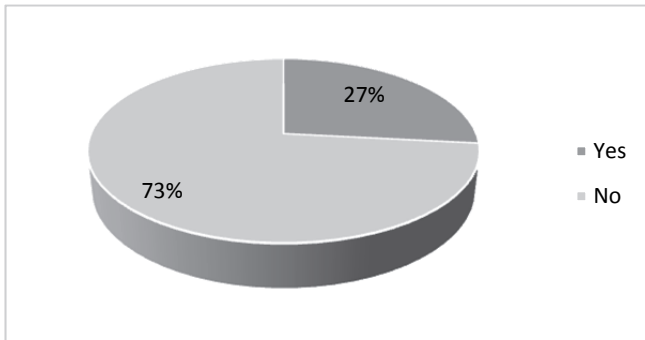
The main data for this action research study came from a post-project survey based on a 4-6-minute-long recorded PowerPoint presentation by 38 students. The initial challenge in this study was how to get students to increase their time spent speaking English outside of the classroom. Since most students only have two 90-minute speaking/listening classes in a week, the author wanted to find a student-centered project using easily accessible technology.

Below is a brief summary of some of the data collected from the post-project survey.

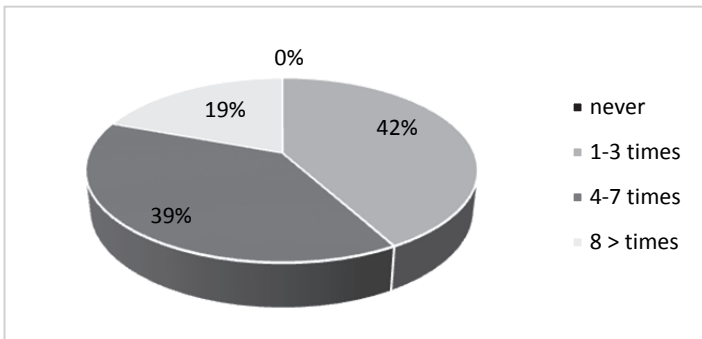
Have you ever used PowerPoint before?



Have you ever recorded yourself speaking English?



In a week, how often do you look at YouTube?



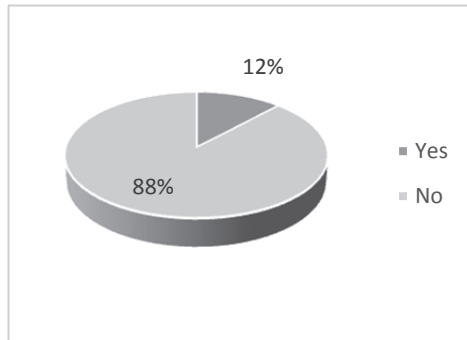
How much time do you spend on YouTube?

< 30 minutes = 13 people

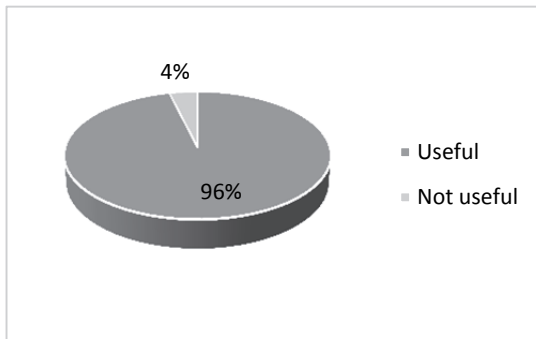
31- 60 minutes = 10 people

61 minutes or more = 4 people

Have you ever uploaded a video to YouTube?



Did you find this project useful or not useful?



Data from English journals by level 1 students

After the project was completed, students were required to write one page in English about their recorded script reading project. Many students mentioned that they now realized the importance of speaking naturally and avoiding 'kata-kana' English. They were sometimes overwhelmed with how hard the project was. In the end, however, it was fun and less stressful than having to present in front of the class.

Data from Japanese Journals by level 1 students

Two weeks after the presentations were completed, I took students to the PC room where they could listen to 3-4 of their classmates' hometown presentations once again. After that, students were asked to write a one page letter offering advice in Japanese to the class of 2018 regarding how to make an interesting/entertaining PowerPoint presentation. Some of the advice that was shared can be found below.

- *'Smile when you speak, it really makes a big difference.*
- *Take photos from different angles and have many back-up photos.*
- *Avoid using photos from Internet.*
- *Smile more when you record your script, if you want to create a cheerful/upbeat atmosphere in your presentation.*
- *Start your project early.*
- *Speak loudly.*
- *Add one or two jokes.*
- *Change your character when you make your recording.*
- *Use 'real' English, avoid 'kata-kana' English.*
- *Repeat important points.*
- *Add a lot of emotion.*
- *Avoid speaking in a monotone voice.*
- *Provide information about your town that would be useful for single or married people/men and women, young and old, rich and poor, etc.*
- *Include 'just kidding' if you want to get extra points.*
- *Speak confidently, everyone can tell how you are really feeling by simply listening to your voice.*
- *Act like the person who is speaking is NOT you.*
- *Overact and exaggerate sometimes to create a dramatic/persuasive effect.*
- *Speak louder than you normally would.*
- *Have pride in your hometown.*
- *Describe well-kept, special sales/services that only locals know about.*

- *Make it obvious that you are smiling as you speak/read.*
- *Make your classmates want to visit your hometown.*
- *Connect some photos to your hobby if possible.*
- *Include some negative points of your hometown.*
- *Describe everything well with passion and great details.*
- *Record each slide as many times as you like and pick the best one.*

Findings and Discussion

After evaluating the students' presentations and reading both essays, the author found 3 distinct benefits to pre-recorded scripted reading presentations. In the following section, the author will discuss some of the findings from the graphs and data mentioned earlier. Please refer to: findings 1. Golden Opportunity within a Familiar Framework. Findings 2. Self-observation and Building Empathy. Findings 3. Downward Spiral of Traditional Presentations

Findings 1. Golden Opportunity within a Familiar Framework

According to the post-project data, 92% of the students were familiar with PowerPoint. As the literature has suggested, introducing new software and hardware into the classroom should not overwhelm learners. Hsu et al. (2008) emphasized the ease of use as key to successful learning. "This feature helps reduce students' cognitive load in learning" p. 184. Technology should be used to enhance the learners experience with the target L2. Despite wide spread availability of language labs and PC rooms in high schools and universities, only 36% of the students in both classes had tried to record their voice for educational purposes. In other words, the author believes that PowerPoint can indeed be used as an effective recording method to develop student's self-awareness and communicative strategies. Out of 27 students, 100% of students looked at videos on YouTube. 87% of students spent less than an hour on YouTube, while 13% admitted to spending more than an hour on YouTube per

day. Despite students spending a lot of time on YouTube only 14% have had experience uploading a video. The author firmly believes that there is a golden opportunity for language educators to use PowerPoint and YouTube as a stage where students can provide meaningful content to an international audience.

Regarding the last question on the survey, ‘would you like to do this project again?’ 96% of the students would be willing to use scripted recorded readings on PowerPoint again. In order for this kind of project be effectively introduced, teachers must first feel comfortable using PC labs and PowerPoint. Perhaps one of the biggest hurdles for some non-Japanese instructors would be dealing with the technological questions that are bound to come up. An additional challenge could be that most schools in Japan use Japanese operating systems on their computers. Institutions could offer informal, annual, refresher seminars/workshops for teachers, so that they too can be made aware of how to take advantage of this golden opportunity mentally and emotionally engage their students with traditional software.

Findings 2. Self-observation and Empathy Building

Students reported being less stressed because their scripts could be checked by their classmates and instructor before making their recordings.

Pronunciation and grammatical issues could be addressed privately without fear of being ridiculed and losing face. Students were able to record their scripts in the PC room or at home with less fear and doubts lingering on their minds. If students felt that their recording were too ‘flat’ or boring, they were simply able to re-record the description of the photo on that one section of their presentation. There was no need to re-record the entire presentation.

Since students were reminded regularly that their presentations were going to be uploaded to YouTube, they paid more attention to: pronunciation, speed, choice of words, length of sentences, speaking happily, intonation, accent and adding some element of humor. Students became aware of how much their intonation changed depending on whether they smiled or not as they recorded their script. Based on the

author's observations, it is extremely difficult for students to enthusiastically read or 'perform' a memorized script in front of their peers in English. Certain crucial elements such as facial expression, gestures and humor are often missing in traditional presentations in front of a live audience. However, in this preliminary project, students were able to review their recordings and imagine how their interlocutors would 'receive' their presentation. In so doing, students were more focused on getting the general meaning across and less concerned with small grammatical errors. Students were reminded often that interlocutors in real life do not walk away because of simple errors in speech. Interlocutors however may bow out of a conversation if the information is not interesting or if the speaker is lacking in charm, confidence and energy. Self-observation ironically helped students to take the focus off of themselves and instead imagine what they can do in order to make their utterances more readily understood by the listeners.

Findings 3. Downward Spiral of Traditional Presentations

In many cases, the only chances that Japanese university students have to use English is only inside of a sterile, homogeneous classroom where they are 'performing' just to an audience of one, their instructor. Very few students are able to take their classmates' ability to understand their presentations into account. Students are generally overwhelmed and stressed out about their own performance and are not focused on the interlocutors. Questions such as: am I using a lot of kata-kana English? Can everyone understand all of the words? Did I repeat important key information and did I pause at the right time to allow my classmates to digest the information? Sadly, the answer to the above questions are often 'no', which means that the first rule of producing understandable utterances has not been fulfilled.

What follows next is a downward spiral of less and less students actively listening to their classmates. Those who have finished presenting are so relieved; they have no incentive to listen to a presentation about a place they will never visit. On the other hand, those who have not presented yet. usually have their heads buried in their notes

dreading that they will be called upon next to present. In the meantime, on any given typical presentation day, there is one Japanese student timidly standing at the front of the classroom, half-heartedly presenting their information to an audience of one, their teacher. Students speaking at the front of room are seldomly rewarded with eye contact, loud applause or laughter with the audience. Speakers are often met with a few blank stares but generally find themselves speaking to the top part of their classmates' heads. Unfortunately, spontaneous nodding by students in the audience is not in response to them understanding what was presented but rather of students taking turns nodding off to sleep.

To avoid this problem, the author had the students record their scripted presentations via PowerPoint. Students reported being excited to see the final version of their classmates' hometown presentation. The author did not notice any sleeping students, instead there was an air of anticipation and excitement as students loaded their PowerPoint presentations into the teacher's computer at the front of the room. Although students may never go to such as places as: Kashiwa, Shirakawa, Akishima, Higashi Totsuka, etc., everyone was genuinely interested to see who could promote their hometown the best.

Additionally, students were instructed to take notes in Japanese of the key points of each hometown. The following week, students were given a short open-notebook comprehension quiz based on their classmates' presentations. Since there was going to be a quiz, students wanted to be sure that everyone would be able get the question based on their presentation correct. Students made every attempt to speak slowly, enunciate clearly, spell out difficult words, describe/translate key words and repeat certain numbers.

Despite telling students about this note-taking comprehension quiz two weeks before the presentation day, students were able to re-evaluated and re-record some parts of their presentation that were not easy to understand. This demonstrated to the author that the students were shifting the role of understandability from the audience to themselves. Students started to notice that difference between being able to *hear* a

presentation and being able to *understand* a presentation. In other words, the students became more aware of their own utterances and tried to make it easier for all interlocutors to understand the content of their presentation. The author would like to emphasize that recorded scripted readings on PowerPoint allows instructors to effectively create a student-centered listening/speaking project that is less stressful but more inspiring for all.

Limitations of this project

While there are many benefits to helping students to become more aware of their L2 output, there are a few challenging issues. In the following section, limitations and challenges will be discussed.

1. Some students may be apprehensive about recording themselves and then having to review it. While there are many positive accounts of students benefitting from feedback from teachers and their peers, there are some instances where students are not so enthusiastic about the practice. Not surprisingly in McIntosh et al.'s (2003) study, some students also expressed discomfort sharing their recordings with others. In order to combat this issue, the instructor reminded students throughout the project that self-reflection is an integral part of their development and that this practice has been adopted by many musicians, scientists and athletes. Nevertheless, many students did mention that it was somewhat 'painful' to listen to their recorded voice booming out of the big speakers at the front of the room. A few students resorted to sticking their fingers in their ears or stepping out into the hallway until their recorded presentation came to an end.
2. This style of recorded, scripted reading does not allow students to focus on interactive communicative strategies such as: turn taking, paraphrasing, etc. While students do have many chances to interact while reviewing their classmates' work, the recording and reviewing process is centered squarely on individual students.

3. Equipment. While most institutions do have computer rooms, there are some that will not have headphones with mics. In such circumstances, the instructor can still take students to the computer room to introduce and supervise the students as they create their presentations. Students will just have to use their computers at home in order to record their scripts which can then be brought in to school via USB and reviewed by their teacher and classmates. If the computer's console is easily accessible however, students can simply plug in their own earphones into the computer's microphone jacks.

While there is no conclusive evidence that self-reflection and scripted reading improves students' English overall, it however creates more opportunities for students to use English outside of the classroom and get them to focus on oral output, pronunciation and fluency. The author hopes to collect more concrete evidence on how much time students actually spent on their recordings. To the reader, it may appear that many statements and findings in this paper are subjective and lack hard evidence. Recording 'aha' moments as students listen to their classmates' recordings or interact with their instructor is quite challenging. Reading the students' first drafts and then see and hear their recorded final version, it is amazing to see how far the students have progress. The sound of the applause and sense of pride that students exhibited when their classmates compliment them on their PowerPoint recordings is indeed a priceless experience. In future research, the author will repeat this project and get more students to upload their work to YouTube. Additionally, dictating emails through smartphones, podcasting, audio blogs and audio-journals are all worthwhile activities that may help students to spend more time on speaking and listening in English.

Conclusion/Overall recommendations

As Paul Nation mentioned in his keynote presentation at the JALT 2017 Conference, 'teachers should find more creative and meaningful ways to reuse/recycle material from the textbook.' Simply skimming over chapters with non-related themes is basically robbing the students of any chances of using scaffolding techniques and

self-observation of their oral output. In this project, it is *not* necessary to correct every error in every utterance but rather to focus on ‘form’. In other words, students should focus on whether or not their output could be understood by non-English speakers in person or on YouTube. Continuous focus on traditional written quiz/test scores may not necessarily help students to become more confident in their oral output. On-going evaluation of long-term projects where students’ performances are closely monitored by the instructor however are very beneficial. While most textbooks are written on a chapter by chapter bases, it is good for students to have one long term project where they can regularly record, review and improve their presentations.

For teachers who want to give students the opportunity to create and share meaningful material, YouTube is one of many options to be considered. Constant improvements with smartphones and personal computers now provides students with countless opportunities to take more ownership of their learning and even contribute something of value back to the international community. This study explored how to integrate common technological tools into foreign language instruction and what some of their advantages and disadvantages were. Results from students’ surveys, and interviews indicate that teaching communicative strategies using scripted, recorded presentations can help students to realize the importance self-observation.

In this initial study, the author was able to increase students’ speaking skills, and motivation to practice listening/speaking outside of the classroom. There is no doubt that more research is needed to investigate how additional recording projects can be effectively used in English language programs. This pilot project serves as a case study to inform both the researcher and Takachiho foreign language instructors of the possibilities if we merely dare to go beyond perceived boundaries.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pkk6CYV5QII>

Partial sample script

My Home Town by 'Mack'

Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, today I would like to tell you about Tsurumi, Yokohama, NOT Tsurumi in Osaka. It is about 23 km from Tokyo station. Most people know this city because it is a check point in the Hakone-ekiden race. Most people would describe Tsurumi as convenient, safe, romantic but hilly and expensive. This year Tsurumi-ku is celebrating their 90th anniversary.

1. River Tsurumi

This is River Tsurumi. As you know, this starts near Oyamada which is close to Obirin University, so I can go home along this river, by boat. Just kidding.

2. Mitsuike Park

This is Mitsuike Park. Actually, this park is sooooooooooooooooooooo big, around about 1.3 km. You also can see many cherry blossoms and many people. It is a famous cherry blossom viewing spot in Kanagawa. You must come and enjoy sometime!

3. Tsukuno and Morinaga

Upper picture is Tsukuno shopping street. It is very famous and you may know it because it is used in many TV drama and music videos. The lower picture is Morinaga Tsurumi factory. This factory makes chocolate so the air smells sweet sometimes.