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## TOWARD A MORE EFFECTIVE BUSINESS JAPANESE PROGRAM

### INTRODUCTION

As Japan's economic power has increased in the international market, Japanese language instruction has gained popularity. The enrollment, therefore, in Japanese language programs also has been increasing. This recent phenomenon reflects a dramatic change regarding the demographic characteristics of Japanese language learners. Historically speaking, students who have majored in Asian languages, literatures, or linguistics have studied the Japanese language. The goals for those students pivoted around reading original literary works and/or analyses of the Japanese language structure. Currently, however, more and more students who are majoring in business and technical areas are enrolling in Japanese language programs with different career goals.

This demographic change of Japanese language learners puts Japanese language educators, especially those who deal with students in business or technology, under constant pressure to assess the students' needs, set realistic goals, and employ innovative approaches to keep their programs competitive and to satisfy the students. Traditionally, the main role of Japanese language educators was to teach students knowledge about the grammatical structures of Japanese with little emphasis on the *use* of the Japanese language. However, as the needs of students changed and the number of students who planned to establish their careers in business-related fields with Japanese language study increased, communicating in global business settings in Japanese became more important than merely knowing about the language.

The current effort by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) to establish National Standards in Foreign Language Education also reflects the importance of communication. "The United States must educate students who are linguistically and culturally

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equipped to interact successfully . . . ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in more than one language . . .” (1).

This emphasis on successful interaction in a foreign language, particularly in Japanese in a global community, has begun to stimulate Japanese language educators to assess their existing programs and guide them toward providing more realistic and functional classroom instruction to students of Japanese.

In this article I will describe Eastern Michigan University’s business Japanese program as well as some innovative approaches that maintain quality instruction and satisfy our business students.

#### BUSINESS JAPANESE CURRICULUM AT EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Eastern Michigan University (EMU) offers two rather unique programs that combine foreign language study and business programs for undergraduate students: *Language and World Business* (LWB) and *Language and International Trade* (LIT). LWB students with Japanese, for example, work toward two separate but integrated degrees: a bachelor of business administration with a major in any one of eight professional areas and a bachelor of arts in Japanese language and international trade. In the LIT program, in addition to the basic studies requirements, they are required to take 30 credit hours from business and economics courses, which include 21–24 credit hours in a business minor. They are also required to take 18 credit hours at the 300 and the 400 level of both general Japanese language and business Japanese language courses. LIT students with Japanese will receive a bachelor of arts in Japanese language and international trade with a minor in Business. The course load for the LIT students is the same in terms of the Japanese general and business language courses, but far fewer credit hours are required in the business area than in the LWB program.

#### JAPANESE LANGUAGE PROGRAM AT EMU

The Japanese language program at EMU serves four types of students: 1) business Japanese students who are in either LIT or LWB programs; 2) education-oriented students who seek teacher certification in Japanese language and culture; 3) students who plan to receive a minor in Japanese language; and 4) those who work full-time and wish to enhance their current employment conditions by acquiring the Japanese language. The goal

of the first three years of Japanese language instruction is to develop general Japanese language proficiency. The fourth-year courses are geared toward either business Japanese students or Japanese certification students.

The Japanese language program incorporates proficiency-based instruction with specific proficiency levels as goals at each level. The goal at the end of the third year of Japanese language instruction is to be at the *intermediate high* level in speaking and listening on the ACTFL proficiency scale, and the goal at the end of the four years of instruction is to be at the *advanced* level in speaking and listening. Students' speaking ability is assessed using the simulated oral proficiency interview (SOPI), a taped Japanese speaking test developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics; these goals are achieved by most of the students. The proficiency-oriented curriculum at EMU incorporates ACTFL's Assessment Criteria presented by Buck et al., where context (when and why) and content (what), and accuracy (how well) are clearly defined and implemented in daily classroom instruction. This approach consolidates the grammar translation method, the audiolingual method, and the communicative approach. The grammar translation method is used to develop accuracy and understanding of the Japanese language structure, the audiolingual method is used in drill practice to promote situational instruction and fluency, and the communicative approach is used to teach students to learn how to get in, go through, and get out of various situations with cultural appropriateness and effective discourse strategies (Nerenz).

The Japanese section offers Japanese language courses at all levels in the evening. The first- and second-year courses are also offered during the regular school hours. This course scheduling reflects the needs of the students of Japanese who work full-time or part-time during regular business hours.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF BUSINESS JAPANESE COURSES

What makes business Japanese classes different from the classes that aim for the development of general proficiency is that the contexts and content are based on day-to-day business operations with specific vocabulary that normally accompanies business situations. In the business contexts, where hierarchical relationships are clearly marked, the language structures used are considerably more advanced on the proficiency scale and more complex than contexts of everyday life. The business Japanese

students, therefore, need to learn both honorific and humble forms, causative constructions, and causative-passive constructions.

The humble form is used to lower the position of the speaker or those related to the speaker. The honorific form is used to honor the position of the person in question. The following indicates examples of the humble and honorific forms:

Honorific and Humble Forms in One Sentence

*Watakushi XX shooji no ZZ to mooshimasu (humble) ga,*

*kachoo-san irasshaimasu (honorific) ka?*

(I am ZZ from XX industry. Is the section chief in?)

The causative construction indicates “make or force someone to do something” or “allow someone to do something.” The following are examples of the causative and causative-passive constructions:

Causative Construction

*Hai, sugu Yamada wo mukae ni ikasemasu.*

(Yes, I will have Yamada [go and] pick you up.)

Causative-Passive Construction

*Kinoo wa osoku made buchoo ni kikakuan wo kakasarete, taihen datta yo.*

(Yesterday, I was forced to work late writing a project plan by the department chief, and it was tough.)

Another frequently used complex linguistic structure in business contexts is the passive construction. The passive construction has two forms: one is the neutral passive; it takes transitive verbs and is similar to the passive voice of English. The other is the “suffering passive,” and this form of passive uses both intransitive and transitive verbs.

Japanese business people frequently use neutral passive in announcements of events where the planner of the events is not clear:

Neutral Passive

(a) *Sooritsu kinen gyooji wa 10 gatsu tooka ni okonaware masu.*

(The anniversary events will be held on October 10.)

(b) *Kotoshi wa, bonus wa 12 gatsu hatsuka ni shiharaware masu.*

(This year the bonus will be paid on December 20.)

When something negative has occurred and the speaker or a person under discussion is in trouble, the speaker uses the suffering passive:

Suffering Passive with an Intransitive Verb

- (a) *Yamada-san, buchoo ni shikarareta n desu yo.*  
(Mr./Ms. Yamada was scolded by the dept. chief.)
- (b) *Kaigi-chuu, X-san ni heya ni haitte korarete, komatta yo.*  
(During the meeting, X-san [unexpectedly] came into the room and we were put in an awkward situation.)

The passive construction is also used as the honorific form.

Passive as Honorific

- (a) *Buchoo wa shucchoo de Osaka e ikare mashita.*  
(The dept. chief went on a business trip to Osaka.)
- (b) *Shachoo wa moo sugu korareru soo desu.*  
(They say that the company president will be here soon.)

In addition to understanding the complex linguistic structures, students require more advanced cultural knowledge in order to use passives appropriately in various contexts. The students need to identify the concepts of “in-group” and “out-group,” and reflect linguistically the difference with culturally appropriate nonverbal behaviors. These “in-group” and “out-group” concepts are rather difficult for American learners to manipulate because what constitutes one group changes depending on the situation, and within an “in-group” there is always a hierarchical relationship. For example, within the company, an employee would use the honorific form to address his or her superiors, but the same employee would use the humble form to refer to his or her superiors when speaking to an outsider about them. This complicated interpersonal skill must be practiced frequently in business Japanese classrooms because it is used in various business situations.

Because of the need to indicate clearly a role of a person in highly stratified business situations, the use of role-playing and simulation practices becomes crucial. Role playing and simulation in the target language, when utilized at the discourse level, can enhance not only the students’ linguistic skills but also their discourse strategies as to how to get in, go through, and get out of various situations appropriately.

Foreign language educators such as Omaggio Hadley and Hahn and Michaelis provide excellent ideas for using role plays. The application of

situational role plays into Business Japanese classrooms can be made relatively easily. Let us look at a scenario of “Visiting a Company” as an example. Visiting a company can be broken down into three parts: 1) Placing a telephone call to make an appointment; 2) Visiting the company; and 3) Reporting to the boss about the visit. Each part can be practiced using situational role plays. For advanced level students, a brief description of the task may be adequate:

Function: Place a Telephone Call to Make an Appointment

Situation

and Task: Your company wants to sell your new product to Company X. As the first step, your team decided to visit Company X to explain about the new product to see their reaction. Call Company X and make an appointment to see Mr. Tanaka in the Sales Dept.

The above role play can become more structured for intermediate students by providing more detailed information including how to enter, maintain, and exit a discourse related to a situation.

(In addition to the function, situation, and task)

Company X: Answer the telephone.

You: Identify your company and yourself.

Company X: Business routine #1. (Use *Itsumo osewa ni natte orimasu.*)

You: Business routine #1. Ask for Mr. Tanaka.

Company X: Tell the caller to wait a moment.

Tanaka: Tell the caller you are on the phone.

You: Identify yourself. Business routine #1. Tell him that you have developed a new product and want to visit him to show the product. Ask for a convenient time.

Tanaka: Tell the caller that Monday at 3 is open.

You: Repeat the time and accept the suggestion.

You: Business Routine #2a. (*Oisogashii tokoro osore irimasuga, yoroshiku onegai itashi masu.*)

Tanaka: Business Routine #2b. (*Kochira koso yoroshiku onegai shimasu.*)

You: Hanging up Routine. (*Shitsurei itashi masu.*)

Tanaka: Hanging up Routine.

Simulations can be considered as consisting of coherent functions to represent a larger chunk such as a whole project with interactions as realistic as possible. To use the above example, the functions involved in a larger scheme may include: 1) Having a meeting within the company about how to sell the new product; 2) Placing a telephone call to make an appointment; 3) Visiting a company to show the new product; 4) Reporting to the boss about the visit; 5) Having another meeting; 6) Visiting the company again to discuss the details of the business deal; and 7) Project-Completion Celebration.

Simulations require more in terms of preparation, and may require problem-solving efforts by students to complete the project successfully, but these activities will prepare students for more realistic interactions.

Recently the number of business Japanese textbooks has increased dramatically (e.g., KIT Materials Development Group; Nichibeï Kaiwa Gakuin; Nissan Motors; Takamizawa; and others). There are also many books and video materials developed by both Japanese and American professionals that deal with business manners as well as misunderstanding and miscommunication among Japanese and American business people (e.g., Asahi Mutual Life Insurance Company; Carison and Smit; Nikkei Videos; and Salomon and Araki). Japanese language educators may utilize the situations depicted in these documents to create realistic role-playing and simulation situations that are suitable for their own students' needs and situations.

#### INNOVATIVE APPROACHES AT EMU

Affective variables such as motivation and risk taking in the language learning process have been revealed as important factors in developing proficiency as well as in acquiring a second or foreign language (e. g., Ely; Gardner; Samimy and Tabuse). The results of these studies suggest that Japanese language educators should create a non-threatening yet stimulating learning environment, one that provides ample opportunities for students to take risks and try out their linguistic hypotheses. These studies also guide us to explore ways to enhance the students' motivational level and guide them to become learners who rely less on the Japanese language teacher and classroom instruction by developing greater self-reliance.

William Cline suggests a correlation between the students' participation in extra-curricular activities related to the target language and their satisfaction in the language programs. Cline's survey results indicate that: 1) the Japanese minor and major students are satisfied with the Japanese program offered at EMU; 2) they rated themselves either the same or better when compared to non-native speakers with a comparable level of education; and 3) they valued their own participation in extra-curricular activities highly.

These observations point to the usefulness of connecting the Japanese language program with outside resources. The innovative approaches introduced in this article deal with this notion of connections that permit one to obtain more information about outside resources and, moreover, to seek various opportunities for the students to apply their Japanese language skills to situations that they perceive as more realistic, meaningful, and closer to their own career goals.

*Connecting the Japanese Language Program  
with Outside Resources*

*Connecting with local high schools and community colleges to recruit business students.* The number of Michigan schools offering Japanese language classes has increased in the past several years. According to the 1994 survey by the Michigan Japanese Language Improvement Project, 47 high schools offer Japanese language instruction in Michigan, especially in the south-east counties near Detroit (Tabuse). There are also many Michigan community colleges that offer first- and second-year level Japanese language instruction. Many students who began learning Japanese in high school, therefore, seek an institution of higher education in order to continue their Japanese language study. The Japanese language section actively maintains and expands communication with Japanese language teachers at area high schools and community colleges to recruit Japanese language students who will continue their study at EMU.

*Connecting with local academic institutions that have work/study programs for both undergraduate and graduate business students.* The Japanese language section at EMU enjoys a particularly close relationship with the Japanese teaching staff at Lansing Community College (LCC) through which there are two excellent nine-month work-study programs in the Shiga and Kagawa prefectures in Japan. These programs enable participants to go to Japan, earn money, and gain work experience in

Japanese companies, while at the same time providing opportunities for the participants to study Japanese language and culture. These arrangements are ideal for those who cannot afford to participate in more expensive study abroad programs. Both LIT or LWB majors are strongly encouraged to take advantage of LCC's programs, and every year we send six to eight students on the programs. The participants all value their experience extremely highly. Many students who complete their study at LCC enroll at EMU and continue their Japanese language study. This arrangement has been very successful and beneficial for both LCC and EMU.

#### *Communicating with Local Business Communities*

*Communicating with local business communities regarding needs analyses.* The Detroit metro area has a large concentration of business establishments related to Japan in various ways. Obtaining information about the companies that have relationships with Japan and getting involved in the local business communities are very beneficial for Japanese language educators who teach business Japanese. Students receive work experience from business establishments such as translation companies, travel agencies, and duty-free stores at Detroit Metro airport where their Japanese language skills are fully utilized.

As a result of our effort to connect with local business establishments as well as educational institutions, we were asked to send our students of Japanese as interpreters at press conferences for the G-7 Job Summit held in Detroit in 1994. We also sent students to interpret for the mayor of Flint and other state representatives at the United States-Japan Initiative in Flint in 1995.

*Communicating with Japanese-related business people and inviting them as guest speakers.* Taking advantage of the connections we have established with a number of business people engaged in Japan-related work, the Japanese section at EMU has invited several guest speakers, both native and non-native from various international business establishments such as Nisshoo Iwai, Japan Export Trade Organization (JETRO), and Ford. For both business Japanese students and teaching staff, it has always been very stimulating to learn about different types of jobs, various communication problems between American and Japanese business people, creative ways to utilize the Japanese language in their work situations, and personal views of life in careers related to Japan.

Guest speakers were asked to talk about what they do at their respective business establishments and describe the history of the company. Those who are native speakers of Japanese have also been asked to give us their opinions about what non-native speakers need to do to promote better communication in their work place. Guest speakers who are non-native speakers of Japanese have been asked to describe, using concrete examples, how they use Japanese in their work situations. The audience is limited to a maximum of 30 students at a time to promote an informal and relaxed atmosphere, with enough time allocated for the students to interact with the guest speakers. These arrangements have also received very positive feedback from the students and teaching staff.

#### *Students' involvement in extra-curricular activities*

Many universities have international student organizations. At EMU, there is an association formed by students from Japan called the Japanese Student Association (JSA). The Japanese language faculty members function as advisors for JSA, and coordinate with JSA to visit every Japanese language classroom to explain the purpose of the association and the activities planned for the academic year. This kind of promotional effort has become so successful that JSA has expanded to include many American members. Tying in with a Japanese student organization can provide opportunities for students of Japanese to find conversation partners with whom to practice their Japanese language outside the classroom, and to participate in planning, designing, and implementing cultural activities with Japanese native speakers on a monthly basis. Participation in these activities encourages students to speak Japanese for real communication.

#### *Horizontal articulation*

Horizontal articulation refers to communication among faculty members from different subject areas. For example, a Japanese language faculty member can work with a faculty member from the Business College to enhance the current LIT and LWB programs. Although traditionally a Japanese language educator concentrated on teaching the Japanese language, this kind of arrangement may have isolated him or her. In order to incorporate what students learn in business courses into their Japanese language courses, it may be a good idea for Japanese language instructors to attend business classes to gain more business knowledge and realize

what students are being taught. This effort by the instructor can make Japanese language instruction more meaningful for business students.

#### ISSUES OF NATIONALITY

The need is evident for business Japanese students to become aware of issues that surround foreign workers employed in a Japanese firm or Japan-related companies. Being aware of issues enables students to make more realistic career goals, and also enables the teaching staff to prepare classroom activities that present more realistic situations.

The President of the Association of Foreign Professionals in Japan, Kerry Berger, an American with extensive experience working in Japan, presents interesting insights and advice to foreign workers for success in a Japanese firm (Berger). He introduces prerequisites for success as well as advantages and disadvantages of working in a Japanese firm. The prerequisites for success include patience, Japanese language ability, and the ability to submerge your personal expectations, your ambition and even your personal career goals into the work of the particular department to which you belong. Among the advantages of joining a Japanese firm, he lists 1) getting a start in the world of business; 2) economic stability; and 3) practical administrative and technical skills acquisition. The disadvantages of joining a Japanese firm include contractual disputes and lack of commitment towards the development of foreign personnel. Students of business Japanese must understand these realistic issues.

#### ISSUES OF GENDER AND REALISTIC SITUATIONS

“Given that the business world is still male-dominated, any deviation in a classroom from that actuality would make the class experiences less than authentic” (Austin, et al. 210). Having female students use the female version of the Japanese language, however, cannot depict clear hierarchical relationships observed in business situations. Japanese language educators are in a dilemma whether to use a rather blunt form of Japanese, which may negatively influence the way others regard the female student.

Jugaku states that the differences between male and female styles can be characterized by the use of more polite forms by females and direct forms by males, and the distinctive use of personal pronouns (e.g., “boku,” “ore,” for males and “atashi,” and “watashi,” by females—the words referring to the English pronoun “I”) and sentence particles (i.e., “-wayo,” “-dawa,” “-noyo,” etc. used by females and “-dayo,” “-dana,” etc. used by males). To show the contrast, some example sentences are provided.

Male	Female	English
Aa, hara hetta.	Aa, onaka suite.	Boy, I am hungry.
Meshi kutta?	Gohan tabeta?	Did you eat?
Udon-ya e ikoo ya.	Udon-ya-san e ikimashoo.	Let's go to the noodle shop.
Asoko wa umaiyo.	Asoko wa oishii wayo.	That place (the food) is good.

As the number of women in the work force increases in Japan, the language used by women also has been changing. A survey conducted by Nippon Hoosoo Kyookai (Japan Broadcast Association) indicates a great change in the opinions expressed by male workers regarding language difference between males and females in professional situations. In 1979, 83% of the male office workers indicated that there should be a language difference between female and male, 16% indicated that the gender difference could be totally eliminated, and 1% indicated that there should not be any gender difference. In 1992, however, 48% supported the gender difference, 45% indicated tolerance toward non-difference, and 5% supported the total elimination of the gender difference.

Coates emphasized two approaches when analyzing different speech patterns between men and women. They are the "difference" in the gender roles and the "dominance" of men in the hierarchical nature of gender relation. In the context of gender difference in a work place, Tajima, in *Kotoba wa Kawaru*, states that in any situation, if a person is responsibly carrying out his or her role and others respect the person and the results, the form of language can be left to personal choice.

Knowing these changes that have recently been observed in Japanese society, Japanese language educators need to be informed of the latest linguistic developments in the work place and possible risks accompanied by the use of a particular style of Japanese to female students, and determine if more direct expressions are allowed by female students or not.

In addition to the language concerns, Nakajima posits the possible gender problems such as sex discrimination and sexual harassment, and suggests that these issues also need to be incorporated in business Japanese education.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article describes the rather unique business Japanese language programs for undergraduate students of Japanese in the United States. Implementing proficiency-oriented Japanese language instruction to build a firm basis in the Japanese language prior to engaging in more complex business Japanese situations appears to be beneficial to this particular group of students. The importance of utilizing role playing and simulations in business language courses is stressed because these activities provide more realistic situations, and are more meaningful to business Japanese learners.

Some innovative approaches to further improve the program were discussed. Considering the importance of affective variables such as motivation, the approaches introduced focus on how to enhance students' interest and motivation. They specifically focus on connections with other sources; linking the business Japanese language program with other academic departments as well as student organizations within the same university; and connecting with local community colleges, universities, and business establishments.

The need to include the issue of nationality was presented. Some suggestions for greater success in a Japanese firm were given by an experienced foreign worker to provide business Japanese educators with a realistic perspective. The dilemma of gender difference in business language education was discussed, including a recent survey indicating the direction toward non-difference by male workers in Japan. It is hoped that the points described will be beneficial and stimulating to other business Japanese language educators.

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