

Using Japanese Language Training in the Education System of Tsukuba College of Technology

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This paper addresses the subject of the use of Japanese language training in the Division for the Hearing Impaired at Tsukuba College of Technology (or TCT). My focus here will be how necessary this training is for hearing-impaired students in Japan as well as its degree of difficulty in higher educational facilities. I will first present an overview of these subjects, showing how students typically become involved in Japanese language study, and then I will review the curriculum and supplemental data related to these courses of study.

1. TCT's Subjects of Japanese Language

Japanese is a required subject for freshmen, who must meet in an 80-minute class once a week. There are 30 units of study during the year, and these are divided among three semesters, with 10 units of study for each term. Fifty first-year students are divided among the five departments, with ten assigned to each. The writer of this paper is the teacher in charge.

2. TCT's Students

2-1. Relation between Education History and Japanese Literacy

About half of our freshmen have graduated from regular high school, and the other half have graduated from a high school for the deaf. In either case, students may have their degrees from cultural or technical courses. However, we have found no correlation among these four categories that affect the education history or Japanese literacy in our students.

2-2. Communication

To enter TCT, a student must fall into one of the following categories: one whose hearing loss is 100dB or more on the both ears, or one whose hearing loss is

between 60 dB and 100dB and finds it impossible or extremely difficult to comprehend normal speech even with the use of a hearing aid. 70% of the students who were admitted to TCT between 1996 and 1998 had hearing losses that fell between 90dB and 109dB. These students demonstrated varying degrees of communication ability and methods. We find that there are significant differences among the students in our classrooms. Some are able to use sign language effectively, while some are reluctant to use sign language. Some are able to speak clearly, and others have more problems with speech.

2-3. Level of Scholastic Ability

Japanese literacy among our highest-ranked students (the top 10-15% of the class) is quite similar to the level of non-hearing impaired students. Those students in the next-highest rank (about 20-30% of the class) are reasonably competent in this regard. The remainder of our students (some 50-60%) demonstrate questionable abilities in their vocabulary and sentence structure. Those students at the lowest level (about 20%) have difficulty in reading technical books as well as writing reports.

3. Teaching Japanese Language

3-1. Reading and Writing

3-1-1. Japanese Notation

It is important to emphasize that Japanese notation consists of the use of characters. There are two character systems currently in use in Japanese notation: *kanji* and *kana*. *Kanji* was introduced in the third century by the Chinese. It uses both ideogram and phonogram. Though there are tens of thousands of *kanji* characters, only a few thousand are currently used in Japan. *Kana* is the syllabic character that has been made from *kanji* in Japan since the 10th century. It has some 46 basic forms in present-day Japanese.

3-1-2. Hearing-Impaired Students and Literacy

The goal of TCT students is to improve their own literacy and to prepare themselves for higher academic work.

On the other hand, *kanji* is a character which has a specific meaning, so one character represents one word. In addition, the combination of more than two *kanji*

turns these into new words that can express a more complicated concept.

The Japanese language has grown by using this capability of *kanji*. Most importantly, the Japanese language produces abstract words and technicalities by means of connecting several *kanji*. Therefore, in order to develop vocabulary and to improve critical thinking abilities, students must master methods of reading *kanji* and grasping its meaning as precisely as possible. However, since a single *kanji* usually has plural pronunciations and plural meanings, it is an extremely difficult task for anyone to master a great number of these in the compounds created from *kanji*.

Indeed, as far as meaning and reading are concerned, average college students do not always have enough knowledge or ability to master these skills. It may often happen that they don't understand specific passages or that they cannot even read them unless these are written in everyday language. However, students without handicaps may be able to understand new meanings, learn from their reading, or notice an error when they are informed by a teacher or by other classmates. Even without looking up the word in a dictionary, they can learn by sound, and then improve or modify their own literacy.

In contrast, how do hearing-impaired students fare in these situations? They may also consult a dictionary or ask someone else for an explanation. However, hearing-impaired students may be limited in using these options if they do not realize a meaning is in doubt. Also, such students may be less likely to receive new information or to know how to correct misinformation. This presents many disadvantages for hearing-impaired students in higher educational facilities.

In order to make up for this, we need to develop a new method of teaching *kanji*. The new teaching system must be different from the one that has been used in elementary schools or middle schools in terms of quality and purpose. This is necessary as a prerequisite for change in both higher education and technical training. This change is needed not only for *kanji* educators but also for special teachers of hearing-impaired students.

It is earnestly hoped that TCT, with its Japanese language education system, may take the lead in the research leading to such changes.

3-2. Honorific Expression

3-2-1. Honorific Expression in Japanese

In Japanese, *keigo* (or the honorific expression) has been highly developed as a means of differentiating expressions, which may be classified in these three ways: respectful expression, humble expression, and polite expression.

Infants and children cannot be expected to use *keigo* in the same way as an adult does. From junior high age on, however, students may be expected to use *keigo* and to behave appropriately on formal occasions. It is generally believed that mastery of *keigo* depends on intellectual ability or class level. It is considered essential for those who have responsible positions in society to use *keigo* appropriately. How, when, and to whom one uses *keigo* is as important as choosing the right dress for different occasions. The use of *keigo* improves one's ability to express oneself. One must understand the rules of expression in order to signal proper intent in communication with others. Furthermore, one's personal relationships may suffer if errors of expression go unnoticed.

3-2-2. How to Cope with Teaching Load.

How does the use of *keigo* apply to the needs of hearing-impaired students? Hearing-impaired students may in fact be praised for their skill in speaking, and it may be taken for granted that they must have ordinary abilities in wording if their pronunciation is clear. In other words, people may also tend to expect that the *keigo* of such students reflect ordinary standards suitable for their social status and age.

While we should endeavor to educate the public in order for them to develop a better understanding of the hearing impaired, how should those students and their teachers cope with this issue for the time being? The current training is being carried out in curriculum on the basis of the following assignments:

- a. To make the students understand "What is the existing meaning of *keigo*? How should be *keigo* applied ?" This is necessary because some students don't understand its value in full, to our regret. Many of these young people lack social experience, and their underdeveloped skills in personal relationships prevent them from understanding these concepts as clearly as they might.
- b. To improve students' working knowledge of *keigo*. Using cheap manuals or forcing students to learn concepts by rote memorization, as some schools or corporations do, is not effective in educating students. Instead, it is very important

to allow the students appreciate the fundamental structure of *keigo*, so that they will understand the power of its application. It would be preferable, in thinking ahead to the teaching schedule of the next year, if we required students to study basic *keigo* earlier.

4. Curriculum and Supplemental Data

The teaching materials and subjects should be selected and made out with a view of raising the level of those in the middle ranks (70% of all the class). The other students, in both superior and inferior ranks, also need to be challenged with more exciting subjects. In addition, the upper ranks should be given more extensive tasks, and the lower ranks should be provided with more appropriate guidance and support.

The curriculum and supplemental data are shown in the following tables.

Table 1 : The first term in 1998

	KNOWLEDGE / UNDERSTANDING					ACTIVITY	
	Vocabulary	Expression	Sentence Structure	Logic Structure	Literary Culture	Composition / Creation	Presentation
1. Orientation						*	*
2. Correction of Sentence a	*	*	*	*		*	
3. Correction of Sentence b	*	*	*	*		*	
4. <i>Keigo</i> a	*	*					
5. <i>Keigo</i> b	*	*					
6. <i>Keigo</i> c	*	*					
7. Synonym a	*	*	*			*	
8. Synonym b	*	*	*			*	
9. Chinese Classics a	*	*	*		*		
10. Chinese Classics b	*	*	*		*		

Table 2 : The second term in 1998

	KNOWLEDGE / UNDERSTANDING					ACTIVITY	
	Vocabulary	Expression	Sentence Structure	Logic Structure	Literary Culture	Composition / Creation	Presentation
1. Interpretation of Criticism a	*	*	*	*			
2. Interpretation of Criticism b	*	*	*	*			
3. Interpretation of Criticism c	*	*	*	*		*	*
4. Thesis Term a	*	*					
5. Thesis Term b	*	*					
6. Thesis Term c	*	*					
7. Introduction to Logic a	*	*	*	*		*	
8. Introduction to Logic b	*	*	*	*		*	
9. Introduction to Logic c	*	*	*	*		*	
10. Composition		*	*			*	

Table 3 : The third term in 1998

	KNOWLEDGE / UNDERSTANDING					ACTIVITY	
	Vocabulary	Expression	Sentence Structure	Logic Structure	Literary Culture	Composition / Creation	Presentation
1. Poem a	*	*			*	*	
2. Poem b	*	*			*		*
3. Poem c	*	*			*	*	
4. Poem d	*	*			*		*
5. Thesis Syntax a		*	*	*			
6. Thesis Syntax b		*	*	*			
7. Thesis Syntax c		*	*	*			
8. Thesis Syntax d		*	*	*			
9. Chinese Classics	*	*	*	*			
10. Composition		*	*	*		*	