

# コミュニカティブ言語教育の時代における日本語教科書の妥当性

## The Adequacy of Japanese Language Textbooks in an Era of CLT

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### ABSTRACT

Since 1970s the number of learners of Japanese language has increased. In Southeast Asia, Japanese is taught in 1200 institutions and CLT is the mainstream teaching methodology. This paper claims that although the current trend in foreign language teaching is focused on the acquisition of efficient communication skills, many Japanese language textbooks adopt grammatical syllabus, subsumed within the perspective of what Widdowson (1984) calls “language as communication”. By examining a popular Japanese language textbook from two aspects, namely function and vocabulary, the paper indicates where the problems with this textbook lie. The paper briefly discusses how the future of Japanese language teaching can be envisaged in a globalized world where English plays an increasingly important role as a *lingua franca*.

1970年代と比較すると、日本語学習者の数は世界で増加している。東南アジアにおいても、1200の機関において日本語が教授され、コミュニカティブ教授法が主流である。しかし、矛盾点はコミュニケーションが推進されている反面、市販の教科書はことごとく文法中心の構成になっている。本稿では機能と語彙の分野に論議を絞り、文法中心の教科書のどの部分に問題点があるのかを追求する。また、コミュニカティブとして定評のある教科書でも Widdowson (1984) の説く Language as Communication の枠内で構成されていることなども指摘する。最後に、グローバル化された現代社会に視点を移し、英語などの「大言語」と対照して、日本語教育がどう生かされていくべきなのかについて簡潔に私見を述べてみたい。

## 1. Introduction

The number of institutions where Japanese language courses are offered has greatly increased since the 1970s. According to a survey conducted by the Japan Foundation (2005) for the fiscal year 2003 [from July 2003 to March 2004], 2.35 million people in 127 countries are learning Japanese. In Southeast Asia, Japanese language courses are offered by 1,200 institutions where 206,000 students are registered and 4,100 teachers, either native or non-native speakers of Japanese, are employed.

Despite a growing interest in and need for Japanese language education overseas, little attention has been paid to the issue of what textbooks to use in language classes. The above-mentioned report published statistics showing that many institutions still lack sufficient teaching materials. It is essential for learners to have access to good resources. It is also imperative for teachers to select the resources that meet learners' needs. In a number of major schools in Singapore and Malaysia, the textbook *Minna no Nihongo* 'Japanese for Everyone' (henceforth, MN) is adopted as a coursebook (the textbook a course is based on) for Japanese language teaching. Consonant with the general trends in communicative language teaching (CLT), the acquisition of 'effective communication' is at the heart of Japanese language pedagogy, though many commercial textbooks, including MN, still adopt a grammar-oriented syllabus and maintain wide international popularity. That is to say, what is targeted by educational authorities may not coincide with what a textbook can actually provide in practice. If the syllabus of the coursebook departs from the course design itself, teachers must have the knowledge, both linguistic and pedagogical, to supplement and develop materials for their own teaching. As many institutions

lack adequate materials, as mentioned above, it is important for teachers to be able to modify the existing materials. To carry out this task, teachers must have a fair amount of knowledge of the structures of a textbook. In this article, I cast light on two aspects of MN, functions and vocabulary, and discuss the points that draw the Japanese language teacher into considering what materials a textbook should contain and how they are to be presented in the context of CLT. Before dealing with this topic, I present, in section 2, the aspects of CLT that are relevant to the theme of this paper. In the conclusion, I extend the topic so as to consider the 'social needs' without which foreign language teaching and learning may not proceed successfully. This indicates that better teaching materials in general, and coursebooks in particular, can be chosen if we take the needs for that language in a society into account.

## 2. CLT

CLT was born in the 1970s when linguists and language educators felt the need for a new method of teaching a second/foreign language. This new wave of thinking was focused particularly on the meaning of language instead of forms, and on learners' independent learning instead of the teacher's instructions. Traditional methods such as the grammar-translation method made use of repetitive practice and drilling, and the process of learning was typically deductive. Some scholars (e.g., Richards, 2005) consider the first twenty years of CLT (1970-1990) to be the period of classic communicative language teaching in the sense that it foregrounded communicative competence, while relegating to the background, rather regrettably, grammatical competence. The new era of CLT began in the 1990s when this clear demarcation was withdrawn. Because the new CLT takes various aspects of language structure

and functions, as well as different aspects of the processes of language teaching and learning (e.g., learner autonomy, learning as social nature, teachers as co-learners) into account, it cannot be described by a single model (ibid.: 28). However, the basic principle of the old and new eras of CLT remains the same; that is, the ultimate task in teaching a second/foreign language is to help the learner to 'use' the target language effectively, creatively and productively. The difference lies merely in 'how' this shared goal is approached. Several fine-tuned CLT approaches (e.g., process-versus product-based approaches) have been proposed since the inception of the new era, though it is still open to discussion as to what is the best method or approach among them, or whether there is a best method or approach at all. Since language learning and teaching typically consists of various factors (ibid.: 24), CLT is confronted with the dilemma that supposedly efficient communication is open to different interpretations depending on the learner's teaching environment, their age and level, and the goals of the learners and so on. Despite these problems, CLT is currently adopted as a general methodological framework in the majority of language classrooms, and it will continue to be an influential methodology for language teaching and learning in years to come. In Sections 3 and 4, I focus on one component of the new era of CLT; that is, the 'importance of meaning' (Jacobs and Farrell, 2003: 8), or to put it differently, the learner's explicit understanding (or 'noticing' to adopt Schmidt's (1990) term) of the meanings associated with language functions and vocabulary usage.

### 3. Functions

Since MN is grammar-oriented, it focuses not only on detailed grammatical descriptions but also on translation as a method of explanation.

An accompanying book entitled Translation & Grammatical Notes provides word-by-word translations of the main parts of each lesson (e.g., dialogs, vocabulary, sentence patterns and example sentences). Despite its strong emphasis on grammar learning and pattern practice, language function is integrated into the dialogs. At the outset of each lesson, there is one short model dialog. The dialogs are all accompanied by a video, enabling learners to understand the conversation visually. Learners are expected to develop communication skills through mastering patterns in naturalistic situations. To take an example, the dialog in Lesson 4 (Volume 1-I) consists of an exchange between a young woman from Indonesia, Karina, who is inquiring about the phone number of a museum in Japan, and a female telephone operator whose family name is Ishida (the English translation appears in Translation & Grammatical Notes).

番号案内: はい、104の石田です。

カリナ: やまと美術館の電話番号をお願いします。

番号案内: やまと美術館ですね。かしこまりました。

There are two language functions at work here: one concerns how to make an inquiry in a formal situation and the other concerns how to respond to such an inquiry. The expression *お願いします* ('favor/request' + 'do' + politeness marker) is translated as 'Could you tell me?'. In MN's vocabulary list, this expression is translated as 'please' and 'ask for a favor'. There are several problems with this approach. First, there is more than one way of asking for a phone number in real life. For example, we may often hear people use the phrase *Xの電話番号を教えてください* 'Please tell me X's telephone number' or its more polite forms such as *Xの電話番号を教えてくださいいただけますか* 'Could you please tell me X's telephone number?'. Some people may use an

interrogative such as X の電話番号は何番でしょうか or X の電話番号は何番ですか Second, when we ask for a telephone number, we are not always in the situation described in this dialog. It could happen that the operator might not be so polite and friendly. She might say お待ちください 'Please wait' or 少々お待ちください 'Please wait for a moment' instead. It could also happen that she might not understand your request and so might ask you to say it again. Another case might be that the operator does not have that number on her list. She might then utter an entirely different phrase that you have not learned in classroom. If the task of learners is to memorize 'one pattern' and repeat it by substitution exercises, as instructed in MN (Explanatory Notes in Vol. 1-1), they would encounter severe problems in authentic situations where exchanges are unpredictable. Another point to be mentioned here is that the textbook does not give a sufficient explanation for the situational use of phrasal expressions such as お願いします. Although it is implied in the dialog that what the customer is doing is making a request, お願いします cannot be used in all situations in which a request is made. Imagine you are in a shoe shop, looking around at the shoes on display with the intention of buying a pair. When you find a shoe you would like to try on, it may be awkward to use お願いします to ask the shop assistant to show you the other shoe it goes with, since お願いします would be more appropriate when you have decided to buy the pair of shoes (i.e., この靴をお願いします 'I'll take this pair of shoes'). Although in the two situations mentioned here (inquiring about the telephone number and asking for a pair of shoes to try on) the speech function is a request, the learner should know that, as Backhouse (1993: 187) aptly remarks, language has idiomatic chunks whose actual use is dependent on the ingredients of a situation.

#### 4. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is another area we have to consider seriously. Since MN relies on translation equivalence to 'explain' the word meaning, we occasionally encounter pairs of words whose English translation does not indicate to the learner the difference between them. The following pairs are some examples taken from the first volume of MN (for the sake of simplicity, I have chosen nouns only):

昼ごはん 'lunch' versus ランチ 'lunch'

切符 'ticket' versus チケット 'ticket'

食堂 'restaurant' versus レストラン 'restaurant'

Attentive learners might be interested in the difference in meaning of these pairs. Teachers should have a systematic knowledge of the Japanese vocabulary. It might be useful not merely to teach different meanings by relying on the translation *per se* but also to explain the reasons why these synonyms exist. To illustrate, all three examples arise from the contrast between Japanese words, either native-Japanese or Sino-Japanese, and foreign loanwords. It is customary that when foreign words enter the vocabulary of the borrowing language, their meaning is narrowed (Yamaguchi, 2007: 54). Let us take チケット as an example. Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus (1996: 640) gives four main meanings for the English word *ticket* that is equivalent to the Japanese word *kippu*: (i) a printed card, etc., that gives one a right, such as to attend a theater; (ii) a license or certificate; (iii) a label on merchandise giving the size, the price, etc.; and (iv) the list of candidates nominated by a political party. Out of these four, the first meaning has been adopted by the Japanese language. Although the difference between the two words is subtle, 切符 might be used more often for a passenger ticket, while チケット is more adequate for an admission or entrance ticket (e.g., a concert, the zoo). In MN,

切符 appears as a direct object in an interrogative sentence without contextual information (i.e., 切符を買いましたか ‘Have you bought a ticket?’). Although the need for pattern practice is generally acknowledged, especially for beginners (practice of interrogatives in this case), this example is problematic, as it does not specify what ‘ticket’ refers to in the real world. Two lessons later, チケット is introduced in combination with コンサート (e.g., コンサートのチケット ‘concert ticket’). MN translates both words as ‘ticket’, and there is no mention that コンサートの切符 is unacceptable. In the second case, attentive learners may be able to infer that チケット is used typically for admission to a concert, but there is always a problem when learning relies heavily on procedural knowledge prior to explicit classroom instruction since not all learners possess the same inferential ability. The point to be made here is that learners may use the similar words interchangeably without realizing their true meanings. It is important to get them to realize or ‘notice’ in the early stage of their learning that similar meanings exist and that they are not always interchangeable but that the interchangeability often depends on co-textual or contextual information.\* 注

## 5. Presenting language for communication

Currently, there are a number of competing textbooks in the market for Japanese language teaching. Many of these textbooks target beginning learners who intend to master basic Japanese. More recently, published textbooks have begun to integrate communication skills. These textbooks integrate the features of spoken language more systematically, replace formal dialogs with informal ones, and provide pair work or role plays instead of substitution practice. Yet, these textbooks do not, in my opinion, differ radically from the older ones to the extent that the basic

design of their materials is an emphasis on ‘patterns’. Communicative skills are to be acquired successfully when instructional activities enhance the learner’s experience with the language; that is to say, such a method prompts learners to think about, reflect on or become aware of what they are doing to acquire the language. Japanese teachers or writers of teaching materials may argue that especially for beginners, memorization exercises or comprehension checks are indispensable. Although a systematic knowledge of the nature of the language is integral, an innovative textbook should include not only deductive but also inductive processes of learning as the guiding principle of its structure. Even after twenty years, Widdowson’s (1984) meticulous distinction still allows us to characterize the Japanese language textbook. He draws a distinction between ‘language as communication’ and ‘language for communication’. In the former, the teacher presents the communication as a set of examples, and in the latter, the teacher conceives of communication as that which results from his or her teaching of communication skills. Learners who have learned the language communicatively will be able to exchange or convey messages in different social settings meaningfully and creatively. Many current textbooks for Japanese language teaching fall under the umbrella of ‘language as communication’; communication is presented as self-contained, taken-for-granted exemplars that the learners should imitate, rather than as dynamic, independent activities that the learners generate in their own right. Another popular Japanese language textbook, *Genki* ‘Fine, Well’ (1999), integrates tasks for selected teaching points in each lesson; yet this integration seems to involve getting the learners to apply some models by means of prescribed practices to produce explicit outcomes.

## 6. Conclusion

Japanese is generally regarded as a less commonly taught language. Because of this, the usefulness of learning it in different societies may be much more limited than that of learning English. The theoretical standpoints of CLT are based largely, or even exclusively, on the practice of English language teaching as a second, foreign or international language. The question arises as to whether all the aspects of CLT should or can be applied to Japanese. Although the number of learners has greatly increased in the last few decades, as mentioned at the outset of this paper, some finish learning at beginning or lower intermediate levels while others may have only used the language in the classroom. In my opinion, we should be well informed of the current needs for the successful acquisition of Japanese in a global context. There have been significant social changes in various parts of the world since the global economy penetrated our social life and education. As a result, language teaching has come to be largely, if not entirely, rationalized, whereby language learning is often equated with the acquisition of practical skills. Another related factor in a contemporary society is that English plays an increasingly important role in communication as a *lingua franca* among different nations. This implies that practical communication by means of less commonly taught languages might become rarer. Given these factors, the nature of 'efficient communication' –the core of CLT–might mean, as also noted in section 2, different things in different contexts. I would suggest that we should, on the basis of our given social environment, consolidate the principles around which our future language teaching will revolve. We can, for instance, modify the scope of the current coursebooks by taking into account the types of learners. I have three groups

of learners in mind: (i) learners who learn the language to acquire skills that could be utilized in their future profession, (ii) learners who learn the language to acquire specialist knowledge about the language, and (iii) learners who want to acquire the language as part of their cultural knowledge. This division of labor lends support to a product-based approach to CLT, which is not, to the best of my knowledge, currently widespread in Japanese language pedagogy. The search for the best method or approach within CLT that suits our teaching contexts will allow us to determine the scope of teaching materials, judge their suitability and, more importantly, keep our classroom teaching up-to-date.

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## 注

Interested readers are advised to consult Yamaguchi (forthcoming) which explains the usage of 181 pairs of Japanese words whose meanings are similar.