

初級日本語 第一巻

Elementary Japanese Volume One

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Elementary Japanese Volume One (EJI) is a textbook for college students who are beginning their study of the Japanese language at the basic level. *Elementary Japanese* consists of two volumes and comprises 27 lessons in total. Volume one contains 14 lessons all of which are designed to be covered in one semester. Each lesson can be divided into five tutorial hours and is designed to be completed within a week. Students are expected to read the Grammar part of the lesson prior to their class participation. In the classroom, emphasis is put more on the use of the language. The length of each lesson is proportional throughout, encompassing 23 to 28 pages, excepting Lessons 1, 3, 5, and 14, which range from 14 to 19 pages. All the lessons are organized coherently and progressively. Each lesson has six major parts: Dialog, Usage, Grammar, Exercises, Kanji, and New Vocabulary. At the beginning of each lesson, a model dialog is presented in comic strip format, mostly a single page in length. Most of the dialogs are between two people, though Lessons 7, 8, 9, 12, and 14 involve three participants. An opening dialog contains the new grammatical constructs to be studied in that lesson. Usage following the dialog picks up words and expressions that appear in a dialog whose meaning or usage needs further clarification. Grammar is the pivotal part of each lesson and explains a sizable number of structural constructs. The part that follows

Grammar is devoted to a variety of exercises that facilitate the student's communicative competence. Following Exercises, students practice kanji. Since EJI targets students who are not familiar with Chinese scripts, this part is preceded by relevant information about the nature of kanji, such as the origins of kanji (Lesson 3), multiple readings of kanji (Lesson 5), multiple meanings of kanji (Lesson 9), and explanations on strokes and radicals (Lessons 7 and 8). Students learn 155 different kanji in total (p. 311). A list of the new vocabulary learned in each lesson is provided at the end of a lesson. EJI comes with one CD containing recordings of dialogs, vocabulary, and listening exercises. *Elementary Japanese: Teacher's Guide* (EJTG) is also available as an additional volume in hardback at \$34.95.

EJI covers most of the basic grammatical and functional constructs, which allows students to acquire four skills at a basic level in an everyday context (Preface). Sets of classroom expressions are introduced in Lesson 1, which enable students to interact with the instructor in Japanese from the beginning. Each dialog has a topic that college students might well encounter in daily life. Topics such as 'Weekend Plans' (Lesson 4), 'Midterm Examination' (Lesson 6), 'At Yamamoto-san's Apartment' (Lesson 7), 'At a Restaurant' (Lesson 9), 'Shopping' (Lesson 12), and 'Winter-Break

Plan' (Lesson 14) involve practical and useful role play. The explanations provided in Usage are mainly pragmatic and cultural in nature. They help students to realize that conversations are not carried out mechanically, but are structured meaningfully. Many other textbooks for elementary Japanese have 'authentic' dialogs, but they do not provide, as EJI does, systematic explanations of short phrases such as back channels (p. 56) or hedges (p. 40). In real life, questions raised by students revolve, quite often, around the usage of vocabulary or phrases. EJI does a good job here. In addition, 'Notes on Politeness' (p. 18) discusses the importance of being polite in spoken Japanese, contrasting this with the casualness found in American society. The related explanations at different places in Usage are impressive.

The major strength of EJI is its ample, clear, and pedagogically oriented grammatical explanations. This is a reflection of the author's underlying principle that grammatical notes should be 'linguistically oriented' and thus will 'explain the rationale behind grammatical constructions and their usage' (Preface). Each explanation is short, concise, and to the point. Let me give some examples. Explanations make use of cross-reference: when the negative form *masenka* is introduced as a suggestion/invitation, the reader is reminded that it also functions to negate the statement (p. 103). Attention is paid to the context, situational or linguistic, that influences language function: two functions assigned to *sumimasen* are shown clearly in a single drawing (pp. 15, 17), and multiple functions of the possessive marker *no* are shown with their English equivalents (p. 21). Words are presented in contrast: antonymous adjectives are given in pairs (pp. 126-7). In addition, I find the list comparing sounds and their realizations in katakana extremely useful (pp. 26-33). First, an understanding of loan words in katakana is an obstacle to learning for beginners. Second, I have not encountered a textbook of the same sort that presents the system easily and in the entertaining

way that EJI does. One comment in Grammar notes concerns the treatment of *tsumori desu* in Lesson 5 (p. 84). The notes state that this construction cannot be used with a third person subject, but it is possible to say *Haha wa ashita Tokyo e iku tsumori desu* 'My mother is going to Tokyo tomorrow' because the mother is psychologically close to the speaker. Note, though, that a similar sentence with a third person subject *Haha wa ashita rokuji ni okiru tsumori desu* 'My mother intends to get up at 6 o'clock' is odd. The discrepancy between the two occurs due to the meaning encoded in the two verbs 'go' and 'get up'. It appears that the use of *tsumori desu* is not merely concerned with Japanese society, but also with the lexical quality of the predicate.

Exercises are another appeal of the book. They consist of tasks and activities that fall under any of the following: substitution, information gap, matching, bingo, sentence completion, multiple choice, reading comprehension, and drill-like exercises (EJTG: 1-9). The communicative exercises demonstrated in Exercises are useful for both students and instructors. Students can build up their speaking skills through interactions, and instructors can learn how to implement a communicative method in practice. EJTG supplies a sample lesson plan for Lesson 3 (pp. 12-34). This gives practical tips on how to make the best use of Exercises in EJI. However, exercises are only a small part of the whole weekly lesson. The largest part of this lesson plan makes use of drawings or actual objects that should be prepared separately. Problems may arise when teachers are not good at drawing or there is a lack of suitable objects, unless they have their own plans as to how the communicative language teaching can be delivered. EJI uses different types of illustrations. Dialogs come with drawings in comic strip format. Main texts are supplemented frequently with illustrative drawings, and less frequently with pictures. Reading comprehensions also come with illustrations. Grammar notes make use of functional illustrations

such as arrows, strikes, squares, and boldface. In Lesson 6 (p. 100), strikes are employed to mark the deleted element, while squares mark the added element. Arrows serve to indicate a change from one form to the other (p. 101). Boldface is used to differentiate between headings and examples that pertain to them (p. 101). In my opinion, boldface could also be applied to phrases in a scripted dialog that are explained in Usage, which would make them more noticeable and easy to remember. With respect to the presentation of protagonists (if one may call them such), there is some inconsistency. The main protagonists in the dialogs are Jimmy Miller, who majors in computer science, and Amy Son, who majors in economics (p. 15). In Self Introduction (p. 6), however, Jimmy Miller's major is introduced as Japanese. He also looks more like an Asian person in the last drawing on this page. Similarly, Amy Son's major is introduced as computer science (p. 18). Although these inconsistencies may not be noticed by all readers, the drawings should give consistent contexts or agree with the text, otherwise the learners may be confused.

There are a couple of points worth mentioning about the layout. I find at first glance that the division of the sections within a lesson is not prominent enough. Consider, for example, pages 132 and 133 versus pages 136 and 137. The part for Exercises looks quite similar to the part for Grammar notes. This may be caused by the similar format employed in both parts. Perhaps it is due to the fact that both parts are not separated clearly or that there are no headings at the top of a page. Second, it is not easy to immediately identify the instructions in Exercises.

One solution is to put the instructions in bold, in a distinctive or bigger font, in shade, or in color. Third, it would be helpful to have wider margins on both sides. Fourth, the sequence in comic strips normally goes from left to right, except in the second drawing in Lessons 2 and 5, where the order is reversed.

Overall, EJI is a sound Japanese language textbook

for motivated beginners who are learning in a structured classroom. It begins at a basic level and the level of difficulty progresses with the lessons. It addresses the learner's and teacher's needs in the classroom and provides explanations for potential questions and queries. It is rich in communicative activities and ideas that will facilitate organizing classroom activities. As with many textbooks currently available, however, teachers who choose EJI as a coursebook should supplement or develop it so that it fits in with their own teaching environment. In this regard, EJI may not offer a comprehensive set of teaching materials. Some teachers may want to have sets of ready-made drawings, some may redesign the scope of kanji practice in a specific Asian context, and some may even wish to have a workbook. The final point is that EJI is in hardback; if it were it in a paperback edition it would be cheaper and lighter in weight.