

Development of e-learning materials for Japanese Language Study - Preparatory Lessons for Beginning Level Students before Their Arrival in Japan-

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Abstract: Two sets of e-learning materials for Basic Japanese Courses have been developed to respond to the needs of the international students at Yamaguchi University. One, is the material the students should study before coming to Japan. The material consists of necessary topics for their early days in Japan, aiming to achieve their easy adaptation and more efficient classes in the Japanese courses. The next step is to develop materials to encourage the students to study on a daily basis in their own country to attain a higher level skills in Japanese before coming to Japan.

1. Introduction

This presentation reports about the e-learning materials developed for the beginner's level of Japanese language learning. So far, we have developed two sets of materials; the first one is the Preparatory Lessons (PL), which the students should study before coming to Japan and the other is to be used for the blended course of Japanese Intensive Course for Beginners (JICB) after the students have arrived in Japan.

In the current presentation, the background of the development of the PL material, its purpose and expected results, study topics covered and some characteristics of the material and an example of one topic are also presented. In this presentation, we mention only the PL.

2. Background

International Student Center and some faculties of Yamaguchi University offer Japanese language courses for international students, but there exist some problems because of recent condition changes and other restrictions. So, as a means to respond to some of these problems, we have been developing e-learning materials.

Some examples of the problems the university has been facing are the following;

2. 1 The diversity of the international students

During the past few years the diversity of the undergraduate has increased as can be seen in their nationalities, fields of interest and levels of Japanese language ability. This is in part, due to the increment in the number of partner universities. Besides, in the postgraduate level, some of the faculties started their own international programs, such as the Double Degree Program.

Different from the regular undergraduate students, a considerable number of the exchange students and many of

the graduate students do not have sufficient level of Japanese language ability to discuss about their field of study in Japanese, but most can do so in English. And in many cases, the International Student Center is expected to teach Japanese to all of these diverse international students.

2. 2 Time conditions of the post-graduate students

Recently, the number of postgraduate level students has increased especially in the sciences and engineering, but for these students their priority is their own research and experiments. This limits their possibility to attend the language classes which are held in the regular university schedule. So it is necessary to find a way to decrease the inconvenience in their daily life to foment their adaptation to Japanese life style and culture.

2. 3 Present conditions of the Japanese universities

Partly due to the reorganization of the national universities, the current conditions of Japanese universities necessitate the development of a more effective curriculum and flexible support for Japanese language learning. It is hoped this will help to attract higher skilled international students and allow the university to make certain its educational consequences and results in their research. But on the other hand, it is not expected to increase the number of courses under the present circumstances in most of the Japanese universities.

Considering all of these conditions, we hope that this e-learning material for self-study language learning will be part of the solution to some of these various problems.

3. Summary of the Materials

3. 1 Outline of the material.

There are two sets of material that we are developing. The first one is called Preparatory Lessons (PL). This material is designed to be covered in approximately one week of study, about thirty hours in total. The students are expected to complete all of the exercises before they arrive in Japan.

The other, is the material used for the JICB after coming to Japan. This material was designed to be used for preparation and review of the classes of this course and also for self-learning. This intensive course is planned to include classes three times a week for twelve weeks. Upon completion of the course, students are expected to have Japanese language ability equivalent to level four of the Japanese Proficiency Test.

For both of the materials, we used "moodle" [1] as a Course Management System (CMS), which is administered

by Media and Information Technology Center (MITC) of the university. The students can access the material only through moodle.

3. 2 Theoretical background of this material.

3. 2. 1 Process

This material has been developed following an idea based on the Instructional Design (ID) [2]. So, this project is in the “Implementation” phase of the ADDIE Process Model (Figure 1), the representative model to show the development of the educational activities.

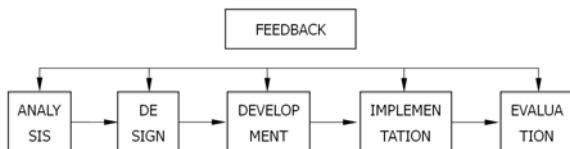


Figure 1. ADDIE Process Model. [3]

So far, we have not completed the needs analysis of the main expected learners, who are still in their countries. The syllabus for this material was selected on the anticipated needs that new international students might have, on the supposition they do not know the Japanese language. It is necessary to recognize their needs in order to improve this material, along with a continuous general evaluation during and after implementation.

3. 2. 2 Motivational strategy design

To attract and make the learners continue to study, motivation will be very important. So, this material has also considered the Motivational-strategy of ID as in Figure 2.

<p>Four categories</p> <p>Interest: arouse and sustain curiosity and attention</p> <p>Relevance: connect instruction to important needs and motives</p> <p>Expectancy: develop confidence in success</p> <p>Satisfaction: manage extrinsic and intrinsic reinforcement</p>
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Figure 2. Motivational Strategy Design. [4]

According to these concepts, we have endeavored to realize the following aspects in this material.

1. **Time.** Each topic is designed to be finished within twenty minutes, including the exercises.
 2. **Multi-media tools.** Several of them are used to help the learners to participate positively, and to feel just like they are in the classroom with someone.
 3. To show **the goal** of every section clearly to the students, hopefully they are in a context that reflects Japanese **real life**.
 4. To allow the students **to control** the rhythm of study and to advance at their own pace, or step by step, confirming their understanding of each step.
 5. To provide **a measure of progress** to the students.
- We are using moodle, so the result of the exercises

and the study history of the students are recorded automatically. The students can check their progress.

A lesson example is shown in the 5. “Learning flow of Hiragana Section.”

4. Preparatory Lessons

4. 1 Expected learners

The expected learners of this material are:

1. Those that have very little Japanese language ability.
2. Those that plan to study in Japan soon.
3. But this material is also useful for students who are already in Japan, and can only learn Japanese by themselves.

4. 2 Purposes and expected outcomes

The purpose of this material is to let the student learn by himself/herself in his/her country, the minimum basic knowledge of Japanese, i. e. useful language needed for their first days in Japan. Accomplishing this purpose will allow us to achieve two results:

- a. To make the newcomer students feel oriented from the first days of their stay in Japan.
- b. To use the class time more efficiently.

We think that if the students can utilize the knowledge they have learned, they can feel closer to the new culture and can adjust to a different culture easier.

We also think that in the first lessons of any basic course of Japanese, there are so many new words and expressions to be memorized. By memorizing some part of them before coming to Japan, we can reduce the burden of the students and can use the class time for communication activities instead.

As a result of using this material, we feel that we can utilize the time of the first days in Japan efficiently, not only for the sake of the students, but also for the classes.

4. 3 Topics covered

The sections in this material are the following;

1. **Guidance** for students that will take part in Japanese courses after arriving in Japan.
2. **Useful Expressions** (greetings, some standard phrases, and a simple self-introduction)
3. The Characteristics of **Japanese Sounds** (Japanese accent, basic sounds and some special sounds)
4. **Hiragana** (Practice of Japanese basic letters)
5. **Katakana** (Practice of Japanese basic letters)
6. **Numerals** (Japanese number system, counters)
7. **Time Expressions** (Expressions for hours, dates, months)

4. 4 Requirements for its use

The following conditions are needed to use this material.

1. The user will need a Yamaguchi University Authorization e-mail account.
2. The user will need to have “Quick Time” and “Adobe Reader” installed on their computer.

5. Learning flow of Hiragana Section

In this section, we will explain the learning flow of the Hiragana section, as an example to show the structure of each topic.

5.1 Login process

Firstly, in order to login to moodle, it is required to sign to a Yamaguchi University Authorization e-mail account and its password, and also to input the profile of himself/herself (only the first time of use.)



Figure 3. Top page of “Preparatory Lessons.”

After the login, if the “Preparatory Lessons” option is clicked, a page as in Figure 3 will appear. Clicking on the topic “Hiragana,” which is in the horizontal menu bar, the screen changes to that topic page, and the user can continue the study.

5.2 After entering in the topic

5.2.1 Subdivision of Hiragana Section

The Hiragana Section is subdivided into the following parts:

1. Hiragana - Japanese Writing System-(top page)
2. Basic Sounds
3. Other Voiced Sounds
4. Syllables with Semi-vowel Sounds
5. A One Week Challenge

In this section, parts from 1 to 4 explain and show the writing of Hiragana system with their sounds, so the learners can use these pages as a reference any time.

In each topic, there are explanations in English that can be read in a few minutes, and later the learner can take advantage of the examples that include voice. There is a “Check Test” at the bottom of the page, the learner can answer to examine whether he/she has correctly understood and memorized the pages’ material, and then he/she can try the exercises of moodle.

The hardest task for the learners will be to participate in part 5 “A one week challenge.”

5.2.2 “A One Week Challenge”

This section is to learn the 46 Hiragana letters and their derivate letters.

(1) “Hiragana -A One Week Challenge-“ section

This first page is a guide to explain how and which of the letters to study each day. There is a list of buttons which allow the user to jump to the page of that day. Basically, the Hiragana letters are divided into groups and assigned to each day as study material. On the final day, i.e. the 7th day, the students are expected to take the quiz of all Hiragana letters by moodle.

At the bottom of the first page, there are three photographs titled “The Hiragana in the Street,” in Figure 4. Depicting life and signs one will see in Japan. These are to provide a goal and show that knowing Hiragana will benefit the student after arriving in Japan. If the pointer is put on the photograph, the Hiragana letters will be highlighted. This provides the learner with a “remote” but practical measure of checking the Hiragana reading ability.

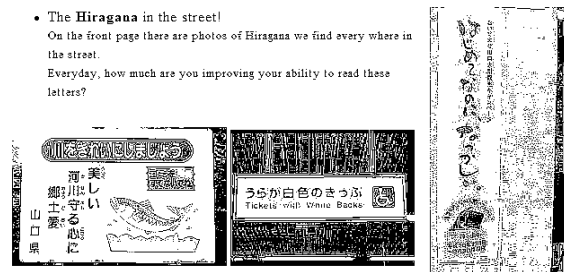


Figure 4. “the Hiragana in the Street!” in the “One Week Challenge.”

(2) The first page of the “First Day”

Each day, the learning content is divided into several steps. For example, the learning content of the “First Day” is divided into four steps;

STEP1 あ(a) – お(o) + ん(n)

STEP2 か(ka) – こ(ko)

STEP3 が(ga) – ご(go)

STEP4 how to write “long sounds”

At the bottom of the first page of each day, there are also three photographs titled, “the Hiragana in the Street.” These have the same roll over system as of the page mentioned above and show the goal of the day.

(3) “STEP1 あ(a) – お(o) + ん(n)”

In each step, there are reading and writing practices and moodle exercises. The process of each practice is as follows:
<Reading Practice>

1. Reading the words listed on the page

Under each letter of this step, there are some words consisting of the letters from the current step. The learners can check or confirm the reading of these words (a) by putting the pointer on the letters, the Hiragana will rollover into Latin letters, or (b) by listening to the sounds after clicking the play button.

2. The drill practice of reading.

When the “Drill” button at the top of the page is clicked, a new window with a drill practice will appear, as in

Figure 5. In this drill, (1) a word consisting of the letters of the current step, (3) the reading of the word in Latin letters will appear and after two seconds the sound will be heard. With this drill, the learners can experience the pattern practice of flash cards with Hiragana as if they were in the classroom.

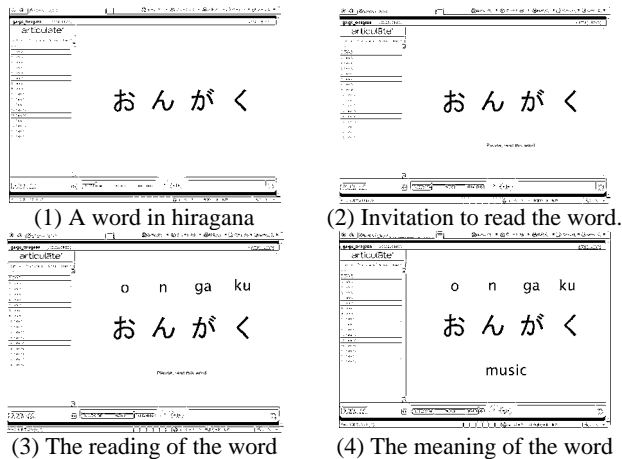


Figure 5. Example of the Drill practice of reading.[5]

<Writing Practice>

1. Download the practice sheet (PDF).

The learners can download a practice sheet, by clicking the “practice” button. When clicking the “Answers” button, the corresponding sheet of answers will appear.

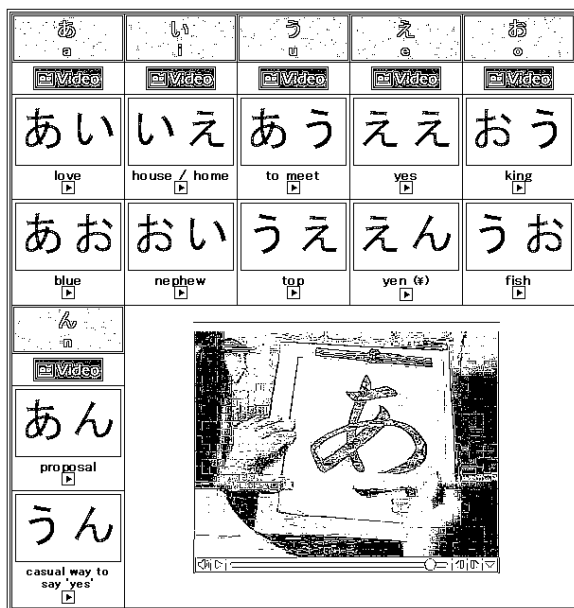


Figure 6. Word examples and video.

2. Learn how to write the letters with a video.

When the “video” button of each Hiragana letter is clicked, a video appears which shows how to write the corresponding letter by calligraphy, as in Figure 6. With this video, the learner can understand the order of the strokes and the reasons why some of the strokes finish with the shape of a hook and so on.

3. Practice with the “practice sheet”

Following the stroke order showed in the video, the learners can practice writing, using the downloaded sheet.

Finally, the learners can do exercises by moodle. In this process, only the moodle exercises will be recorded in the study history of each student.

The learners are expected to advance step by step. But the learners can start with any step freely and can advance to the next step at anytime.

6. For further development

Presently, we are using the first version of this material as the class material for Japanese courses and we have been finding some bugs and other problems that need to be solved. As for this preparatory material, the following aspects remain to be developed;

1. We have never used the material with students who are in their own country, so we can say that the students have continued to study with the instruction and care of the instructor. In order that the students could use this material for their self-study, more written or recorded instructions (video tutorials) are required and we will have to find a way to provide a mentoring or tutoring system on the web.

2. Besides, as a material of language learning, we would have to re-examine the syllabus and the structure from the perspective of ID, reflecting the result of the needs analysis and feedback from the students.

As a kind of solution of the first point, MITC is developing a dynamic system to control the moodle quizzes.

Through the use of these materials and improvement by adopting the ADDIE model, we would like to establish a better e-learning system.

References

[1] moodle site <http://moodle.org/>
 [2] W Dick, L Carey, J. O. CarayK, *Hajimete no Instructional Design*, Pearson Education, 2004, *The Systematic Design of Instruction Fifth Edition*, Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc. , 2001.
 [3] K. Tamaki (ed.), *E-learning Senmonka no tameno Instructional Design*, Tokyo Denki University Press, 2006
 [4] J. M. Kelly, “Motivational design of instruction,” *Instructional-design Theories and Models: An Overview of their current status*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1983.
 [5] Designed using Presenter by Articulate®

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