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Ikuko Kurasawa
Oberlin College

Ayumi Nagatomi
MIT

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Ikuko Kurasawa
Oberlin College

Ayumi Nagatomi
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

STUDY-ABROAD AND INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS: REFLECTION AND ARTICULATION FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

The number of students who go to Japan is increasing every year. Although the purpose of their target culture immersion varies from student to student, they return with some authenticity in using the Japanese language. How well do the Japanese classes that students take prior to their departure serve them? What might be necessary for them to be better equipped to make the most of their experiences in Japan? What will they do with their new language skills now that they have become functional, and even comfortable, conversing in Japanese? Where are they going from here? As foreign language instructors, what can we do for language learners after they return from Japan? In this article, we first explore the pedagogical implications of the discrepancies between the current curriculum and the needs of students who plan to intern, referring to the results of a survey conducted at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Second, we discuss the importance of (1) the assessment of students' language skills; (2) students' re-definition of their language goals after having studied abroad; and (3) students' self-analysis with Language Management theory for advanced-level students (Neustupny, "Nihongo") and include the results of a survey of returning interns and study-abroad students from which we draw pedagogical implications.

THE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM AT MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

The internship program at MIT was created in 1981 to address the "Science and Technology Gap" between the United States and Japan. Specifically, while an MIT faculty member accompanied a group of Japanese executives touring a US plant, he was impressed with their command of English and came to wonder how many people in the US could display their technical expertise with such confidence in Japan. He returned to MIT determined to prepare students with the cultural and technical sophistication to operate

at the highest professional level in Japan (MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives).

Every year approximately 30 to 40 graduate and undergraduate students go to Japan through the MIT internship program to work alongside Japanese colleagues from leading companies and institutions. During their internship, which lasts from six weeks to one year, they are expected to enhance their Japanese language proficiency and their understanding of Japanese culture and society.

Those who wish to work as interns must take two years of Japanese language courses and a culture course such as “Introduction to Japanese Politics and Society,” which consists of topics in the areas of politics, economy, technology, and education. In addition, the students are required to participate in seminars and survival-type training, including a two- or three-day retreat in which future interns bond with other participants and program alumni, receive information on logistics, and work on their problem-solving skills through case studies. They are expected to learn the Japanese language at the same level as an intellectual adult in Japanese society. Assuming such objectives, the Japanese-language courses at MIT have long emphasized the importance of *keego* and *katakana*, specifically.¹

In terms of coursework, since there are only four hours of Japanese instruction per week, it is necessary for the curriculum to set priorities. If interns are expected to contribute their expertise through technical translation, it is assumed that they should be well versed in how words borrowed from foreign languages are written in the *katakana* phonetic alphabet. If interns are to do presentations in front of not only their colleagues but also their supervisors or people outside the companies or institutions, they should show the requisite deference by using honorific and humble, polite forms, called *keego*. However, the observation of different proficiency levels in Japanese language among returning interns seems to reflect how much or how little they had to utilize their Japanese language skills during their internship. One of them said that she seldom used *katakana*, and another mentioned that he did his presentations in English. Do the current Japanese language courses suffice to fulfill the needs of the interns-to-be? And, what exactly are those needs in the first place?

¹We will use the Romanization used in *Japanese: The Spoken Language* (Jordan with Noda 21–23).

SURVEYING THE NEEDS OF INTERNS

A survey was conducted to investigate the discrepancies between the current curriculum and the needs of students who plan to intern, in order to improve the current curriculum in such a way that it might better equip them to have a successful internship. Results from 16 of about 30 returning interns indicated that interns did not seem to be expected to have a very high proficiency in Japanese language. Rather, they contributed to the companies or institutions through their expertise in English. Few had the opportunity to utilize their reading and/or writing skills in Japanese. Most of them did converse in Japanese, but mainly in casual settings, such as during lunch breaks and after work. Thus, they had little opportunity to use *katakana* and *keego*, contrary to the assumption of the importance of both. Moreover, the survey indicated the importance of the skills required to learn on one's own. For instance, it was challenging for the students to determine when and where to shift their style of speech although they had learned both casual and formal speech styles. Using computers with a different configuration was also a surprise: Although one intern expected to find *katakana*, he had to learn Japanese equivalents of words such as "forward," "reply" and "re-send" written in Chinese characters, *kanzi*.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Instructors should familiarize themselves with the needs of future interns, examine the discrepancies between those needs and the current curriculum, and improve the curriculum to better serve the internship program. Since the number of class hours prior to interns' departure is limited, priority should be given to helping students build a solid foundation that will enable them to learn on their own outside the milieu of formal language instruction.

Learning to function [in Japanese] extends far beyond the capacities of any institution to deliver sufficient formal instruction. The consequence of this is that responsible institutions must prepare individuals to learn on their own, that is, to become ultimately managers of their own instruction. (Walker et al. 15)

Thus, from day one, instructors should provide contexts in which short and simple utterances can be utilized in a business setting. For instance, *Situree-simasu* ["excuse me"] can be used not only when students enter an instructor's office, but also when they have to interrupt a conversation with business

associates by accepting a cell-phone call. Also, from the earliest stages of beginning Japanese courses, students may be encouraged to find information by exploring websites such as “*Sarariiman Neo: For the New Age of Office Workers*” with the help of on-line dictionaries.

As for shifting speech styles, it is important for students to have opportunities to speak Japanese with a number of different native speakers of varied backgrounds. Thus, the “Japanese Lunch Table,” where students and Japanese people in the MIT community gather once a week over lunch, has now started to extend its invitation to students who study English in Boston as well as to researchers of other institutions, with language exchange partners available upon request. Specific needs, such as writing a resume in Japanese, could be covered during the Japanese Lunch Table or through a student’s own language exchange partner.

POST-STUDY-ABROAD AND THE “ADVANCED LANGUAGE CLASSROOM”

Not every kind of classroom can accommodate every single student perfectly, and this may be especially true of the advanced language classroom. Any such course will have students of various levels of language proficiency and language background, and its definition also depends on the institution (Kamiyama 56). How, then, can an advanced language classroom best serve students, especially those returning from internships and study-abroad programs? According to one survey (Kurasawa), returning students’ interest focused on their language behavior, and their main question seemed to be how Japanese language learners might contribute to a conversation as normal members of society. Results also show their specific linguistic concerns, based on their interactions with native Japanese speakers, e.g., the usage of honorific language (*keego*) and conjunctions, how to initiate conversations, and cultural and societal issues such as native Japanese expectations of a foreigner/non-native speaker. In follow-up interviews, we investigated their interactions more closely.

These interviews used various methods (semi-structured, interaction interview and recall interview²) and, prior to the interview, interviewees were asked to write five personal episodes of interaction with native Japanese speakers in Japanese. These collected episodes were analyzed in a Language Management Theory framework to be distilled and implemented into the curriculum for the advanced language classroom.

²See Miyazaki for additional references.

LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT AND ITS APPLICATION

Language management theory³ (Neustupny, “Nihongo”) or LM, deals with language errors in interaction as well as “behavior towards management” (Fishman 1971, quoted in Neustupny, “Process”). LM has five distinct stages: deviation, noting, evaluation, adjustment, and implementation, which constitute a useful set of conceptual stages of language management. The interview data, once analyzed, showed some particular types of errors and issues from which were drawn several pedagogical implications. Classroom activities for advanced-level students were pooled from the interviews, and the best ideas were: (1) recounting of problem episodes, (2) conducting telephone conversations, (3) performing simple mechanical drills in context, (4) recording books on tape, (5) differentiating written and spoken language, and (6) summarizing on-line news and presenting it in class.

(1) Episode telling: The purpose of sharing a problem episode is not only a good exercise for public speaking but also for peer editing and learning. As learners share real-life events, others learn from the experiences. A student might share the story of a mispronunciation or misunderstanding of a Japanese word—*byooiin* (“hospital”) for *biyooiin* (“hair salon”), for example—and the confusion that ensued. Cultural misunderstandings or faux-pas often provide even more pertinent lessons than do verbal ones. The class, in sharing these experiences, becomes familiar with the patterns of misunderstanding that commonly arise.

(2) Conducting phone conversations: Even in textbooks for the elementary level, set dialogues for telephone conversations are introduced. However, deprived of visual cues a language learner comes to depend on, anxiety arises even in advanced students. One student commented that “I always think that my explanation is not good enough [for the other] to understand what I am saying on the phone.” Practicing phone conversations not based on a set dialogue and without the comfort of visual contact can provide more opportunities to practice how to make oneself understood and to explain the purpose of the call, or just to get used to the non-visual situation itself.

(3) Performing simple mechanical drills: Fossilization of language errors is something to which advanced language learners are particularly prone, but to a great degree have to work on themselves. However, a classroom can

³For additional references, see Miyazaki; Neustupny (“Deeta”); Neustupny (“Nihongo” and “Process”).

provide simple mechanical drills to draw learners' attention to embedded errors in their proficiency.

(4) Recording books on tape: This exercise can lend smoothness and fluency as well as provide an opportunity to correct students' pronunciation and authenticity of accent.

(5) Differentiating written and spoken language: The casual style of spoken language can differ markedly from the relatively formal style of written Japanese. It is important to emphasize the difference in the classroom and form the distinction as clearly in the students' minds as it is for native speakers.

(6) Summarizing news and presenting it in class: This exercise can expose students to current events in the world in the target language. Japanese Broadcasting has on-line news with narration of the script so that learners can go to the site and check pronunciation and accent. After reading the articles, learners are encouraged to write and submit a summary (for written language) and to present it in the classroom (spoken language).

CONCLUSION

Whether students go to Japan to study or work, it would be ideal if they could leave for Japan with confidence and also utilize their knowledge gained abroad after they return. Current curricula should be periodically examined and improved to meet students' needs. However, it is unrealistic for the limited number of formal lessons in class to fulfill all the needs, which may vary depending upon their designated company or institution in Japan as well as their proficiency in Japanese.

After their return from an internship or study abroad, a classroom setting might not be considered the best environment for language learning; however, a classroom can function as students' "home," where they feel comfortable in bringing questions and making errors in the target language. Based on their own experience, returning students know best what kind of skills and knowledge they lack and what goals they have set for themselves. Students' self-analysis with LM for advanced-level students could help not only language educators but also learners as a framework to examine issues in interactions. Reflection can also help to reset a student's own goals and is necessary to lead learning in the right direction. Thus, it is necessary for instructors to explore ways to facilitate students' lifelong language learning by helping them build the solid skill foundation on which they may continue their own journey toward their desired objective.

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