

## Desiderata for a New Generation of Nihongo Kyōzai in Germany

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In Germany more than 8000 learners attend classes every year to learn Japanese. The author takes the view that, probably due to the one-hundred-year-old academic tradition of Japanese-language teaching in Germany, a great deal of the basic concepts of courses and textbook design have gone out of date. On the one hand, it is stressed that methodological improvements which proved to be successful in teaching European languages should be taken into consideration in the classroom and by authors of new textbooks. On the other hand, much more research in applied linguistics and the pragmatics of the spoken language is needed, because many fundamentals for Japanese-language teaching (separate frequency lists of vocabulary and grammatical structures for different target groups, exercise design for communication-orientated courses, etc.) are still lacking. Other basics are taken for granted though their legitimacy has never been proved.

Like many other countries, Germany experienced a 1980s boom in the number of people wishing to learn Japanese. In 1989 an estimated eight thousand Germans attended classes at about thirty-five high schools, thirty universities, eighty adult evening classes, and a few other institutions. The number of Japanese-language classes in Germany increased tenfold from those in the early seventies, when not much attention was focused on Japan as an economical power.

If we compare the approximately one thousand high-school students taking Japanese as a third foreign language with the 10,000 to 20,000 students taking Russian, Spanish, or Italian (irrespective of the millions being taught English or French as compulsory subjects), however, it becomes clear that Japanese in Germany is still be considered a “minor language” in popularity. At present, as Eastern Europe becomes more important in politics and economics, the prospects for the development of Japanese language studies at all levels are quite uncertain.

The first Japanese textbooks in German were published when Japan started its in-

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dustrialization in the Meiji era (Noack, 1886; Lange, 1890); others followed after Japan demonstrated its strength in the wars with China and Russia (Plaut, 1904; Langenscheidt, 1910). Many more, of course, accompanied Japan's emergence as an economic power in the late seventies and early eighties.

Today no less than nine textbooks out of more than twenty may be said to be in use (Table 1). This quantity appears to give a rather large choice to the teacher and the learner at each level. Compared with the situation two decades ago, a progress can be seen on many levels. When comparing these textbooks with those of the more popular European languages, however, much needs to be done to make them an effective mean of language teaching and learning. Questions of language teaching (in contrast to philological studies) have not gained much recognition in the history of Japanology in Germany, so only a few textbooks are written by university staff—primarily intended for academic circles, many of these texts are about grammar. Consequently, most books—especially those aimed at nonacademic learners—are written by nonspecialists who have little experience in language teaching, not to mention their lack of a detailed knowledge of applied linguistics.

Recently more and more people have become aware of the need to meet a booming demand from Japanese-language students, and demand has created the need for methodological improvements. A first very innovative project was carried out in the middle of the eighties; to standardize the conditions of courses at adult evening classes, a proficiency certificate for Japanese was introduced.

As done previously for many European languages, three catalogues (syllabuses) listing essential speech intentions (greetings, apologies, conversation starters, and conclusion markers), vocabulary and basic grammar structures, as well as a list of basic kanji

Table 1 Japanese Textbooks Used in Germany

	A 1964	B 1973	C 1979	D 1980	E 1981	F 1983	H 1985	I 1987	J 1987
Educational Institution									
University		?	⊙		⊙	⊙			
Adult School	?	?		⊙			⊙		
High School								⊙	⊙
Textbook Format									
Script <sup>1</sup>	R	K	K	R	K	K	R <sup>2</sup>	K	RK <sup>3</sup>
Subject of Beginning	nouns	verbs	nouns	verbs	verbs	nouns	nouns	nouns	verbs
Spoken Language	⊙			⊙			⊙	⊙	⊙
Written Language		⊙	⊙		⊙	⊙			
Illustrations				⊙		⊙		⊙	⊙

Notes: The textbooks used are: A: Zachert, 1964; B: Tamamushi, 1973; C: Foljanty, 1980; D: Ito, 1980; E: Saito and Silberstein, 1980; F: Lewin, 1983; G: Hadamitzky, 1985; H: Mochida, 1987; I: Free University of Berlin, 1987.

<sup>1</sup> R=Romaji used only; K=Kana/kanji used from the beginning.

<sup>2</sup> Kana introduced from Vol. II.

<sup>3</sup> Kana used increasingly from Lesson 1 to 4.

were determined and declared as the minimum for integration into future textbooks and learned by students as a prerequisite to pass proficiency examinations. (One example of this trend is the Australian high-school syllabus for Japanese.)

Because of many advantages for both the teacher and the learner, standardization of the curriculum is now under discussion at both the high-school and university level. German students of Japanology feel very uncertain about what they are expected to know at what stage (this may be one reason so many students take the Japan Foundation Proficiency Test administered every year). Only recently a first agreement was reached on the approximate number of Japanese words (4,000) and kanji (1,000) to be learned after two years of study.<sup>1</sup>

I would like to outline some of the many problems we have had to cope with for designing new textbooks. Obviously, they are not all genuine problems of Japanese studies in Germany. Also, I am quite certain some of my ideas may be considered rather controversial.

Regardless of whether a curriculum centers on oral communication or reading ability, there is no up-to-date research available either on word frequency or the frequency of grammatical structures. The single study on character frequency in newspaper texts was done nearly twenty years ago.

“Basic vocabularies” determined by Japanese experts on rather subjective grounds may be of some value when teaching classes in Japan. A vocabulary for a homogeneous group of foreign learners, however, must reflect some characteristics of their special cultural background. A basic vocabulary for English learners, in principle, is not a basic vocabulary for Korean, German, and African learners as well. I hope, therefore, that the new Japan Foundation Language Institute will help to provide us with frequency lists for didactical purposes.

While frequency lists can be prepared by rather mechanical research, the arrangement of their contents in a textbook needs a great deal of consideration and at least some creativity. Vocabulary cannot be introduced just by frequency; it has to be presented in meaningful sentences and contexts. This applies to grammatical structures as well. The question whether a simple structure always should precede more complex but rather frequent structures, I believe, needs more research. Empirical studies also should be done to verify theoretical claims that, in comparison with the static approach (starting with “A wa B desu”), the dynamic approach (introduction of the verbal sentence first) would contribute to greater achievement in language competence.

Many authors introduce simple kanji first, even though the kanji may not be used frequently. Of course, there must be some simple kanji in the beginning, but as soon as possible, students should learn to write most—but not all—of the words they speak. There should be a correlation between frequency of kanji in the fictitious (textbook/classroom) environment and the real world. Thus the frequency of newspaper characters should be given special attention even when selecting kanji for the beginner’s level,

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<sup>1</sup> The numbers shown may appear low. It must be remembered that in Germany students are required to take courses in two supplementary subjects besides Japanese-studies classes.

if reading newspapers is the next objective after improving a learner's speaking and hearing ability. When oral communication is given preference, does it make sense to introduce words such as *yama*, *tsuki*, and *kawa* in the text just because you want to start with the simple kanji?

Regarding the script for learning Japanese, despite a strong (Japanese) majority in favor of a radical use of kana, there is still no unbiased, scientific evidence that learners will be at a later disadvantage if they use romaji at the very start.

Grammar is important. Explanations should be correct, extensive, and systematical while also being intelligible. Students are not necessarily linguists. A learner's grammar is different from the linguist's. Do Germans emphasize grammar too much?

Our textbooks should provide a large choice of exercises for the teacher and the learner. Let them select from that choice what suits their needs and interests. In reality, however, even today we do not find much variation in exercise typology. Most exercises (like expansion/translation, fill in the blanks, answer the question [or even give the question to this answer], and inflection drills) may contribute to grammatical competence. But we urgently need exercises that develop the ability to communicate too. Learners should also be given help to memorize words. (If you do not know the word, what can you express with grammar rules? Words will be understood in most cases, even if grammar rules are incorrectly used.)

The following examples may illustrate a type of exercises that differs from the traditional. Examples one and two are meant to cover grammar, communication, and vocabulary competence at the same time. The third example may be used in vocabulary and grammar training only.

#### Example One<sup>2</sup>

Mary, a poor swimmer, sees a small child fall into a canal.

What is the best response Mary should make?

- a) hurry away
- b) look for a lifesaver
- c) pretend to faint
- d) phone the police

#### Example Two<sup>3</sup>

1. *Yamaguchi-san o shōtai shitan desu ka.*

*Iya, ano hito ni shōtai saretan desu.*

A asks if B has (. . .) C.

B corrects A. She was (. . .) by D.

2. *Yamaguchi-san o sasottan desu ka.*

*Iya, ano hito ni sasowaretan desu.*

a. pushed [him]

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<sup>2</sup> From Rohrer, 1978.

<sup>3</sup> Demonstrated by Charles Quinn at the International Symposium on Japanese Language Teaching, Nagoya 1989.

- b. woken [him] up
- c. helped [him]
- d. introduced [him]

#### Example Three<sup>4</sup>

1. Which word is unlike the others?
  - a. *sensei—tomodachi—doitsujin—suika*
  - b. *sakki—kōen—kyō—kinō*
  - c. *shimasu—tabemasu—jūsu—kaimasu*
  - d. *depāto—eki—tegami—sūpā—kissaten*
2. Which word would fit in?
  - a. *hon—yomimasu | tegami— . . .*
  - b. *nani—yasai | . . .—sensei*
  - c. *takakatta—yasukatta | ookikatta— . . .*
  - d. *sanji—goji—shichiji | niji— . . .—rokuji*

Even some Japanese teachers tend to underestimate the significance of accent exercises. But can accent really be neglected? Doesn't a wrong accent become the cause for misunderstanding in many cases where words and grammar are quite correct? It may be difficult to indicate the accent of each word in a textbook, but since many students are slow at distinguishing the pitch differences just by listening, and others don't have the opportunity to listen to a native speaker's pronunciation, I suggest that accent should be visualized wherever possible—at the least, it should be indicated in the vocabulary list of each lesson. Additional accent exercises should also be included in every lesson.

Last but not least, I hope that in the future there will be no more textbooks in Germany that look like academical reports, conspicuous of their lack of conjugation tables, pictures, and illustrations. Now that desktop publishing is easily available, it should be fun to give a textbook an attractive layout.<sup>5</sup> A textbook's design is particularly important when the text is used for teaching Japanese in a place so far away from Japan. It needs, however, much more creativity than academic skills.

If we assume that the success of a language course depends most heavily on the ability of the learner, and secondarily on the teacher's personality and the atmosphere created in the classroom, the influence of the textbook may be small. Nevertheless, comparing these elements of language study, the textbook seems to be the one that could be improved most easily. I hope that further discussions in this journal will help us to do so.

<sup>4</sup> A translation from the German in Free University of Berlin, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> We must consider, however, that given a total of not more than 4,000 people that start learning Japanese in Germany every year, to publish a book on Japanese in German is still quite an economic risk.

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