

Teaching Japanese at a Public High School as an ACT Teacher of the Jorden Method

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Key words: Jorden Method, EEP, ACT teacher, JSL, high school education

The Educational Exchange Program (EEP) started two years ago and has sent more than a hundred Japanese native teachers to the United States and Canada. This program provides Japanese teachers for rural institutions where such teachers are not available.

Trained as an ACT teacher of the Jorden Method, the author taught Japanese in an American public high school for one year, using *Japanese: The Spoken Language* (JSL) as a textbook.

The Jorden Method is the most famous method used for Japanese education in the United States. It is characterized by team teaching, speech primacy, natural talk, context-driven drills, pedagogical grammar, primary introduction of katakana, and instruction of functional culture.

This method has been utilized primarily in intensive language training courses used to develop language professionals. When the method is used in an ordinary school setting, various problems arise. The author points out the urgent need to develop a textbook for high school students.

After teaching English at high schools in Japan for five years, I had the opportunity to come to the United States and teach Japanese at a public high school while studying foreign language education at the University of Alabama through the Educational Exchange Program (EEP). This article describes the problems and possible solutions in teaching Japanese at a high school using *Japanese: Spoken Language* (JSL) (Jorden and Noda, 1987) as a textbook.

The Beginning: EEP and Teacher Training Workshop

The EEP is sponsored by the Hokkaido International Foundation to provide Japanese instructors for educational institutes that intend to offer Japanese courses but cannot obtain appropriate instructors. Usually the institutes are colleges and universities where the instructors can study on scholarships. In my case, the local school system

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had a plan to provide a Japanese course in its high school and asked the University of Alabama to send a teacher of Japanese.

A two-month teacher training summer school was held at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, prior to the fall semester of 1989. Eleanor H. Jorden, the author of JSL, directed the workshop, which was combined with an intensive Japanese program for beginning learners of the language. Training involved lectures on methodology and philosophy, as well as microteaching practice using students from several American universities. Most of the EEP participants did not have experience in teaching Japanese. Thus, the training course was practical so that the EEP lecturers could teach immediately after the course as native teachers of Japanese using JSL and the Jorden Method.

The Method

The Jorden Method is used to foster the development of highly proficient speakers of Japanese. It has been used extensively in Cornell University's Falcon Program, an intensive Japanese training course.

Jorden herself does not like her methodology to be called the "Jorden Method," because her way of instruction is constantly changing for further improvement, and there are no fixed golden rules (Suzuki, 1990). Hereafter, the Jorden Method refers to the methodology presented at the teacher training workshop at Bryn Mawr College in 1989. Its characteristics will be presented in this section.

Team Teaching

Jorden asserts that Japanese is so different from English that it cannot be taught and learned in quite the same way as French, Spanish, and German. She calls those commonly taught languages "cognate languages," and the less commonly taught languages, like Japanese and Chinese, "truly foreign languages." The truly foreign languages are difficult to understand, as well as to acquire both the linguistic code and the cultural code. Therefore, Jorden maintains that team teaching is the most effective way to help students become proficient in the truly foreign languages.

Under the careful planning of a program manager, learners are team-taught by "base-language" teachers and native Japanese teachers. Base-language teachers give instruction on grammar and the sound system, while native Japanese teachers provide the learners with authentic models of speech and behavior in classroom drills (Jorden and Walton, 1987). The base-language teachers are called FACT teachers, and the native Japanese teachers are called ACT teachers.

Classroom Drills in Context

It is difficult for English-speaking people to understand the cultural code embedded in the Japanese language. Jorden maintains that the English-speaking society is a low-context society while the Japanese-speaking society is a high-context society. One example of how the cultural code is embedded in the Japanese language involves the complicated system of expressing formality and different levels of politeness in Japanese. "Because there is no such thing as neutral speech in Japanese, foreigners must learn to

categorize a speech event in terms of the social status, familiarity, sex, age, and other characteristics of both speaker and addressee, long before the execution of speech itself ” (Jorden and Walton, 1987).

Frequent omission of subjects or predicates as well as the complexity of expressing formality and politeness levels makes it very important to bring context into classroom language activities in learning Japanese. Jorden believes that the ACT teachers’ task is to give meaningful reality to dry core conversations in the textbook by using visual aids such as pictures, charts, and tangible props so that learners can participate actively in the practice.

An ACT teacher hands learners some props like yen bills, shopping lists, leaflets, maps, phones, commodities with price tags, and bags, thus indicating what the situation is and what learners are expected to do. The teacher first models the conversation by talking with one of the learners, then learners follow the model when they are called on, substituting the necessary expressions according to the props and conditions the teachers give them. By adding and changing conditions and props, the ACT teachers expand the activities. This way of conducting drills is called “context-driven” drills, as opposed to “script-driven” activities in which learners are given direct verbal indication of tasks.

Culture

The rapid expansion of Japanese learners in the United States has led to a shortage of Japanese language teachers. As a result, many Japanese people were asked to teach simply because they were Japanese. In most cases, they did not have any opportunity to be trained as teachers and were forced to teach without learning any kind of teaching methodology. Jorden severely criticizes such nonprofessional ways of teaching, calling them the “sushi-tempura approach,” because those teachers tend to make sushi today and cook tempura tomorrow, without teaching the Japanese language itself (Jorden, 1988).

Too much emphasis on cultural components sometimes leads to disregard of “language instruction,” but all the cultural components should not be neglected. The cultural component that the Jorden Method emphasizes is the cultural difference between the base language and the Japanese language, which may cause serious problems in communication.

The culture that is closely connected with communication is called a “functional” culture, in contrast to an “achievement” culture like flower arrangement or tea ceremony and an “informational” culture involving historical, political, and geographical information (Hammerly, 1985).

The distinction between the three types of culture is sometimes difficult. The knowledge of what Japanese people eat is informational culture, and knowledge of the dishes of Japanese food and the skill to make them are achievement culture, and the correct manners for eating those dishes (for example, how to sit on a cushion and use chopsticks) are functional culture. Much more important than the distinction between them is the philosophy of the Jorden Method underlying insistence on functional culture.

Jorden maintains that the initial and ultimate goal of language instruction should be

the development of proficiency. Japanese is reported to be two to three times more time consuming than cognate languages (Omaggio, 1986). Learners and teachers have limited time; therefore, the learning of Japanese language has to be efficiently designed and performed. That is why Jorden asserts that for the effective and efficient development of learners' proficiency, teachers of Japanese should treat only the aspects of functional culture so as to prevent serious misunderstanding between second-language speakers and native speakers of Japanese.

Natural Speech

Jorden states that the goal for learners of Japanese should be native speakers' Japanese. She does not insist on perfect pronunciation and sentence structure. She says that so long as it is comprehensible to native speakers, a non-native speaker's pronunciation should be accepted; non-native speakers can hardly be expected to eliminate every error in speaking a second language.

She believes, however, that non-natives can obtain the accuracy close to native speakers with proper training. Natural speech hereafter refers to speech with pronunciation understandable to native speakers, accurate language control, and speed acceptable as normal Japanese.

Jorden's insistence on natural speech is expressed in actual classroom exercises which teachers are supposed to follow: (1) teachers are not allowed to use "teacher talk," i.e., excessively slow speech by a language teacher for the learners' understanding of the target language; in the Jorden Method, teachers are expected to use only the expressions that learners have already learned, but they are supposed to talk at a normal speed; (2) teachers are encouraged to make corrections to prevent later fossilization of inaccurate language control caused by lack of instruction on accuracy in the early stages; (3) teachers are supposed to pay attention to every one of the learner's utterances: choral reading is eliminated and pair work and group work are prohibited; (4) the class size should be limited to less than ten students.

Jorden insists on natural speech because of Japanese intolerance to inaccurate production of their language. Contrary to popular opinion, she maintains that ordinary Japanese are not tolerant of the mistakes made by a non-native, because they are not used to listening to non-natives speaking their language. To make matters worse, Japanese do not express their feelings; on the contrary, they compliment the non-native's inaccurate Japanese and later tend to talk about it behind his or her back.

It is especially important during the early stages to pursue natural, normal-tempo speech and accurate language control. Jorden mentions the difference between language learning in adults and children. She agrees with the distinction between language learning and language acquisition (Krashen, 1983). But contrary to Krashen's assertion that ability in communicating in the target language can only be developed by language acquisition, she maintains that adult learners can acquire a second language through language learning. Adults already have their native language which hinders picking up a second language in language acquisition but helps build up the second language in language learning.

Furthermore, adult learners cannot spend two to three years just to say, "Mam-

mamammaa . . . ,” and once learners get used to too slow speech (teacher talk), they cannot easily stop depending on it. Therefore, it is necessary from the viewpoint of effectiveness and efficiency to use normal adult speech from the beginning.

Jorden touches upon the phenomenon called “terminal 2,” reported by a CIA Language School, among its learners. Many of the learners who were fossilized at level 2 proficiency in the school’s five-scale guideline did not have formal instruction on accuracy in their early stages of language learning; they had just “picked up” the language (Omaggio, 1986). Jorden says that she believes in correction because habit formation in the early stages is crucial to language learning.

Speech Primacy and Instruction of Writing

Jorden has a strong belief in speech primacy. Among the four language skills (speaking, listening, writing, and reading), she asserts that writing is the least important in the early stages of language learning, considering the needs of beginning learners. Since the Japanese writing system is so complex, and students’ language-learning time is limited, Jorden thinks that reading should also be eliminated from early language instruction. She maintains that speaking and listening come first in learning Japanese.

In the Jorden Method, the first two to three months are supposed to be spent only on instruction in speaking and listening using the textbook written in Romanization. Thereafter, learners begin to learn the Japanese writing system. Japanese language has three types of writing: hiragana, katakana, and Chinese characters. Learners first learn katakana, which are used mainly to describe loanwords and foreign names. After learning how to express foreign names places and loanwords in katakana, they begin to learn hiragana, using the words and sentences they learned during the past several months.

Because native speakers of Japanese learn hiragana first in elementary school, introducing katakana first often brings about an argument. But Jorden says that it will be much more reasonable to begin with katakana. Beginning learners can obtain lots of information from billboards and advertisements by knowing only katakana, and they cannot get enough information by reading hiragana because usually hiragana is often used in combination with Chinese characters.

The use of Romanization is also controversial. Romanization has a tendency to cause Americanized pronunciation. Native Japanese speakers usually do not use the Romanization; therefore, it is of no use to learn Romanization to express Japanese when a learner is going to communicate with native speakers. Jorden’s reply to this argument is that Romanization is just a security blanket for adult learners. Oral instruction using tapes and classroom conduct can overcome Americanized pronunciation, and learners are not required to be able to write Romanization. In addition, she maintains that Romanization can be helpful in understanding the conjugation of verbs in the Japanese language (Suzuki, 1990).

Pedagogical Grammar

Jorden makes a distinction between theoretical grammar and pedagogical grammar. The former is the description of the language rules made by linguists to analyze the language, and the latter is the explanation sequenced by language-teaching theorists to

teach the language effectively. She maintains that the grammar used in language learning should be different from the grammar that native speakers learn for analysis of their native language. Grammatical explanation in the Jorden Method is quite different from the Japanese grammar that Japanese learn in Japan.

The use of this pedagogical grammar, as well as the use of Romanization, invites criticism from native Japanese teachers who are trying to teach Japanese to foreign learners in the same way as they were taught. Responding to this criticism, she asserts:

Students of a foreign language are not trying to become foreigners. They are studying language in order to be able to communicate with members of a foreign culture through the spoken and/or written target language. The effective language program concentrates on a methodology that suites the mind-set of the learners—that enables them to achieve their goals promptly and efficiently (Jorden and Walton, 1987: 121).

Prescribed Method for EEP

Considering that in most cases EEP participants go to places where no FACT teacher is available, the following teaching method was suggested to minimize the teaching/learning difficulty and maximize the effectiveness of the Jorden Method.

First, all classroom instruction is given in Japanese spoken at a natural speed to have the students enjoy the opportunity of having a native Japanese teacher.

Second, students study grammar and vocabulary through reading JSL by themselves. Avoid lecturing on the grammar and accept only questions.

Third, students memorize Core Conversations as their preparation for the class. They should use language laboratories if available.

Fourth, teachers develop students' tasks, from mere memorized dialogues to simulated real-life conversation with substitution and expansion drill techniques.

Fifth, to bring reality to the classroom drills and help students understand the cultural and contextual function of expressions in the Core Conversations, teachers use visual aids and videotapes supplementary to JSL.

Sixth, writing is introduced two to three months later. Katakana comes first.

Seventh, examinations must include oral interview tests so that students can feel classroom activities and evaluation are directly connected.

After the two-month workshop, EEP lecturers were sent to their institutes with the Jorden Method modified for them to teach individually at local colleges and universities.

Using the Method in Practice

General Observation of Japanese Education in the U.S.A.

The recent proficiency movement, especially the growth of Japanese language study, is relevant to the relative economic imbalance of the United States relative to Japan. M. Met (1988) identifies the four factors relating to the need to promote foreign language studies as economic, political, social, and intellectual benefits for individuals. Among the four, the most important seem to be economic and political. She points out that

Japanese salespersons in the United States who speak English number about ten thousand, while American salespersons in Japan who speak Japanese are fewer than one thousand (Met, 1989).

After the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), the burden of increasing international competitiveness seemed to be placed on education. The report asserts that the scholastic achievement of American students has been declining and recommends that American education should put emphasis on the four subjects critical to the nation's strength: math, science, computer literacy, and foreign languages (Millman, 1989). Probably foreign language education for advancing national interests is the actual reason for the recent proficiency movement. As a consequence, what the government needs now is foreign language speakers with superior teaching proficiency.

To promote nationwide foreign language education, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) guidelines describing proficiency levels for foreign language speakers were developed to use as the common yardstick for teaching and testing. The Oral Proficiency Interview was introduced, and many syllabi are being designed based on the description of proficiency in the guideline.

Alabama is no exception to the recent proficiency movement in the United States. Since September 1987, all high school students pursuing an Advanced Diploma have been required to take at least two years of foreign language. Weekend seminars, summer immersion institutes, and grants to support study abroad have been provided for high school teachers of foreign language since 1986 (Millman, 1988).

A Japanese course was offered in the Tuscaloosa city school system during the 1989–90 school year as part of the heightened interest in foreign language education. Central High School, East Campus, was the site of the course. Enrollment at Central High is 1,250; only juniors and seniors can register for admission. (Younger students go to the West Campus.) This configuration resulted from the integration of two former high schools, one white and the other black. Six students (five boys and one girl) were enrolled in Japanese. Five were seniors and one was a junior.

One year later, the Japanese course was not offered due to lack of enrollment. I will discuss the difficulties I faced with the course and the probable causes for its failure.

Potential Problem: The Perception Gap

Looking back on the history of Japanese education in the United States, Japanese has been learned only by a small number of people who really need to speak the language. Now, however, learners of Japanese are rapidly increasing. As a consequence, many students with less necessity and low motivation are beginning to learn Japanese, prompted by curiosity or the need to satisfy core curriculum requirements.

For most people in America, especially in rural towns, the Japanese language is still just a curiosity. While the government encourages foreign language study for economic prosperity, many individuals take Japanese courses to satisfy their intellectual interests or to obtain a cultural understanding of Japan. It is this gap that might be the cause of confusion and failure in the promotion of Japanese language education in secondary and higher education.

Too much emphasis in the proficiency movement has resulted in frustration. R. A.

Schulz (1986) maintains that language programs with liberal arts requirements must necessarily have broader goals. She recommends that reading, listening, writing, and the development of oral proficiency must be integrated with cultural understanding and insights into the system of language and the language as a system of communication.

Problem 1: The Treatment of Culture

The ultimate goal of the Jordan Method is undoubtedly the optimal development of oral proficiency. Teaching Japanese takes a tremendous amount of time, and the pursuit of efficient instruction for the development of oral proficiency results in cutting off “achievement” and “informational” culture. This causes a serious problem when a teacher brings the philosophy of the Jordan Method to a rural public high school. High school teachers cannot neglect educational goals of the school system, the school objectives, or educational objectives of the whole foreign language faculty. It should be taken into consideration that language education at a public high school is, by nature, different from the language training aimed at producing language professionals.

Among the general goals and objectives for modern foreign languages in secondary schools, the *Curriculum Guide for Foreign Languages*, 1989, written by the Tuscaloosa City Board of Education includes the following items:

- C. An acquaintance with the history, geography, culture, and literature of the target countries.
- D. A knowledge of the contributions which the target language and culture have made to the United States's language and culture and to show the relationships between the two cultures.

Thus, the “achievement” and “informational” cultures, as well as the “functional” culture, are expected to be taught in foreign language education. A teacher of Japanese dealing entirely with “functional” culture would be at odds with teachers of other foreign languages, as well as with the goals and objectives spelled out in the curriculum guide.

When I taught at Central High, the principal of the school asked me to include cultural content in the curriculum of the Japanese course, in addition to teaching the language. This insistence on cultural content was exhibited by other teachers. For example, a home economics teacher asked me to explain how to make some Japanese food in her class.

Apart from school education, S. Hayashi points out the reality that “when teaching Japanese in foreign countries, we can not just teach the Japanese language [by] neglecting other things” (Ezoe and Hayashi, 1986: 251). He asserts that most native Japanese teachers cannot help being expected to introduce Japanese culture in general, because the Japanese teacher very often is the only access to Japan and its culture that a school has.

At a public high school, it is difficult to limit educational goals only to the development of communication skills. This does not necessarily mean that the Jordan Method is wrong in principle when dealing with treatment of culture. Teachers of Japanese language still have the problem of having to cover a tremendous amount of language items. It should be noted, however, that being a high school teacher inevitably requires

more than just teaching a subject, and that teachers can stimulate students' motivation by teaching "informational" and "achievement" cultures (Kawai, 1990). A remaining problem is to what extent a teacher must be involved in teaching culture.

Problem 2: Demands on Students

The Jorden Method was originally developed for intensive language courses. Learners are supposed to be immersed in Japanese while they are learning. Jorden suggests that learners need at least two hours of preparation for one Japanese class. When EEP lecturers adopt the Jorden Method for use in their teaching, Jorden suggests that they should be careful about pacing. Compared with students in an intensive course, those in an ordinary school setting have to study not only Japanese but other subjects as well.

In teaching high school students, I found that a teacher has to be even more careful about pacing and the burden placed on students. High school students have six classes a day, thirty classes a week. Students taking Japanese classes tend to be capable students; therefore, the other classes they take usually are also demanding.

Another point to be taken into account is that foreign languages are subordinate to other subjects, and Japanese is considered to be relatively insignificant when compared with other foreign languages. In other words, students are likely to give up studying Japanese when they feel that a teacher is demanding too much. As a result, teachers of Japanese at high schools must develop student motivation, yet not be unreasonably demanding.

For these reasons, a teacher often does not expect a great deal of student preparation. But a teacher cannot easily give up assignments, because in the Jorden Method practice with tapes and the understanding of sentence structures by learners are indispensable for the success of learning. The lack of FACT teachers makes the problem more serious.

For some students, the Jorden Method is an incredibly different approach to language learning from what they have experienced in the past. It is a key for the learner to understand how the methodology works to be proficient in the target language. One of the important tasks for a language teacher before teaching the language itself is to convince the learners that the method will, in fact, work.

An ACT teacher is supposed to speak only Japanese (though in actuality this is quite difficult). Even though an ACT teacher may break the principle and explain the workability of the method to the students in English, it is a very hard job for non-native speakers of English to cope with the students' suspicions about the methodology. For the students, it is quite difficult to memorize large amounts of dialogs and spend a lot of time practicing with tapes at home without understanding the necessity of it. Individual practice using tapes is the key to the success of this method; the lack of an English-speaking teacher seemed to have been fatal to the course at Central High.

Problem 3: Difficulty of Understanding Textbook

It was difficult, as expected, for the average high school student to understand the explanations in JSL just by reading it. In addition to the difficulty of the Japanese language itself, the use of unfamiliar terms such as "nominal," "verbal," "adjectival,"

“perfective,” and “imperfective” intimidates students. There is a good reason to use these terms, but confusion is unavoidable without a teacher’s help.

Density of the language materials to be introduced at one time is another problem. For example, when each of the three predicates is introduced, students are given, sequentially, four different forms: imperfective affirmative, imperfective negative, perfective affirmative, and perfective negative. In English education in Japan, students learn the past tense in the second year of instruction, and this seems to be the same for teaching Spanish and French in the U.S.A. (There is a controversy about the Japanese syllabus in which learners have to wait one year before they learn to describe past things.) Presenting twelve different forms of the predicates during the first one month is a problem when teaching high school students.

A countermeasure on the teachers’ side is necessary, but because an ACT teacher is supposed to speak only in Japanese in the Jorden Method, the lack of a FACT teacher makes this difficult. I had to give up speaking only Japanese in my classes. It was quite difficult for a non-native speaker to explain to students subtle differences between Japanese expressions. Sometimes I unconsciously used half-Japanese and half-English explanations, which not only gave a bad model to the students but also made it difficult to establish a Japanese-speaking atmosphere.

Team teaching by a base-language teacher and a native Japanese teacher is recommended for high school Japanese education. Since high school students have short attention spans, a sixty-minute drill session is difficult to perform. A base-language teacher and a native Japanese teacher lead a class best by working together, taking turns according to the types of instruction.

CONCLUSION

Other than the above three problems, there were a few additional ones such as evaluation, support from other personnel, and facilities. Personally speaking, I felt it really difficult to balance teaching at a high school and studying at a university. These problems are omitted in this article in order to focus only on the problems using JSL and the Jorden Method at a high school.

To include “achievement” and “informational” cultures in the course, some countermeasures were necessary to help students understand the descriptions in the textbook, and reduction of the content in some way was needed to use JSL at a high school. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to develop a better approach to teach Japanese to high school students. I hope this report will help those who are going to establish a Japanese program at a U.S. high school.

It is essential that a textbook appropriate for high school students be developed. Since we have to teach using one of the existing JSL textbooks for the time being, teachers need to modify the textbooks and seek better ways of application.

I do not want readers to think that I am saying JSL and the Jorden Method are ineffective in teaching Japanese. Indisputably, the Jorden Method has produced many proficient speakers of Japanese. The problem is not the inability of the textbook and the method but the inappropriateness of using them unaltered in a high school setting.

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