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American Pedagogy, Japanese Cultural Expertise: A Hybrid Distance Learning Model for Teaching Japanese to Americans

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Key words: **distance learning, Japanese language instruction, facilitator expertise, secondary education**

Results are presented for a two-year study of alternative facilitator modes used with Japanese language courses delivered by the satellite-based TI-IN distance learning system in the United States during 1990–92. In 1990–91, secondary school students at an experimental site in the Texas Center for Educational Technology were provided with four modes of local site course facilitation, varying from no content or teaching expertise to a native Japanese speaker leading local conversation based upon lesson plans provided by the distance learning teacher. During 1991–92, the progress of one of the original four students was followed through the second year of Japanese, which utilized a "normal" TI-IN model of instruction and local facilitation. Student and facilitator ratings, interviews with students, facilitators, and the instructor, and performance data were analyzed to produce major findings.

INTRODUCTION

The TI-IN Distance Education System is headquartered in San Antonio, Texas and broadcasts secondary school courses to approximately 1,000 satellite down link sites in 29 states of the United States (Szabo, 1990). It is considered one of the leading providers of distance learning to schools in the United States (Moore, 1990, p. xix). During the 1990–91 school year, TI-IN scheduled 21 courses, 12 of which were foreign language instruction in French, German, Japanese, Latin and Spanish (TI-IN, 1990).

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The 1991–92 school year included a similar schedule of 21 classes, with 11 foreign language courses in the subjects previously mentioned and French (TI–IN, 1991).

The Texas Center for Educational Technology (TCET) was created by the State Legislature in 1990 to conduct research and development related to the use of technology to improve education. One purpose of the Telecommunications and Informatics Laboratory of TCET is to evaluate the effectiveness of distance education systems. During 1990–92, this laboratory conducted an analysis of foreign language distance education using the TI–IN Japanese I and Japanese II courses as exemplars. The specific goal was to determine the effect of having a native Japanese language speaker serve as the required local site facilitator for students.

Subjects

Four students from a neighboring school district drove to the University of North Texas Monday through Friday to attend the TI–IN class broadcast from a site approximately 300 miles distant, via satellite. (Five students were initially involved, but one withdrew from school shortly after the TI–IN course began.) Three of the four students were high school seniors, and one was a junior. Three of the four were female. A female graduate student from the University of North Texas who was a native of Japan served as a local site facilitator for the four Texas students in the high school class during the fall of 1990. A different native Japanese speaker, who was also a female student at the University of North Texas, served as the facilitator during the spring of 1991. A third University of North Texas female student, who was a native of Texas and spoke no Japanese, served as the North Texas site facilitator for Japanese II during the fall of 1991 and the spring of 1992. The instructor was an American male who had majored in Japanese in college and lived in Japan as an exchange student during his high school career.

Overview of TI–IN Instruction

TI–IN instruction typically follows a Live-Interactive Facilitated Television Model (LIFT; Long and Marks, 1989). The teacher in a television studio designed for instruction broadcasts content via satellite to students at several sites simultaneously. Students use auto-dialing telephone handsets at their local sites when they have a question for the teacher, or when the teacher asks them to answer questions or to take part in discussion. The system is one-way video, two-way audio. All students always see the teacher, but the teacher only hears the students, either simultaneously in small groups, or one at a time.

1990–91 Procedure

The TI–IN Japanese I teacher broadcasts instruction to approximately 80 students at sites around the country for 50 minutes each day, Monday through Friday, over a period

Reviewed

LESSON PLANS
MAY xxx
MAY NOT ———
BE COPIED FOR STUDENT USE.

COURSE: Japanese 1

TEACHER: 1-800-234-1245

☐ UNIT PLAN Number of Lesson
☒ ONE WEEK 11/12 - 11/16 Date From To
☐ TWO WEEKS Date From To

DATE OR LESSON NUMBER	EE/SE	OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITY	RESOURCES/ HANDOUTS	HOMEWORK/ EVALUATION	FACILITATOR NOTES
MON. 11/12	1abc 2abc 3ab 4ab	Learn the past tense of verbs- mashita Learn to write ha-ho.	Drills changing the present tense to past tense. Students copy teacher's writing	Text p. 23 Part IV.	p. 27 B Exercises p. 7 in Exercises for writing.	
TUES. 11/13	1abc 2abc 3ab	Classroom instructions using -te kudasai	Sents repeat after teacher. Students call in to make requests in Japanese.	See list of verbs p. 93.	p. 27 C	Please check homework and writing practice.
WED. 11/14	1abc 2abc 3ab	Using kara for because.	Teacher explanation. Students explain situations (cause/ effect in Japanese.	Textbook p. 24. Part IV #5	がんばって	Please check homework.
THUR. 11/15	1abc 2abc 3ab 5a	3-5-7 Day!! Pronoun use in Japanese.	Teacher explanation. Students phone in with answers using different pronouns.		ください	
FRI. 11/16	1abc 2abc 3ab	Check mastery of Unit 4 material by taking Test #5.	Take Test #5	Test #5		Copy SCANTRONs and mail in per usual routine. Have a good weekend.

Fig. 1 Lesson Plan

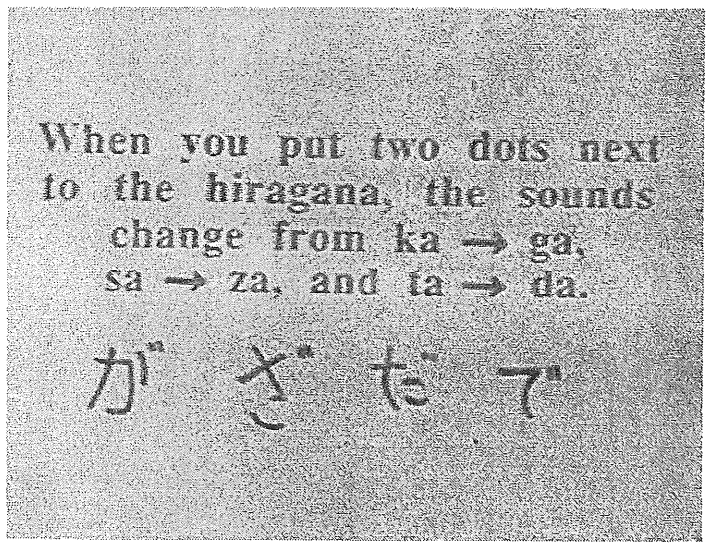

Fig. 2 Sample Japanese Language Teaching Screen as Viewed on Television

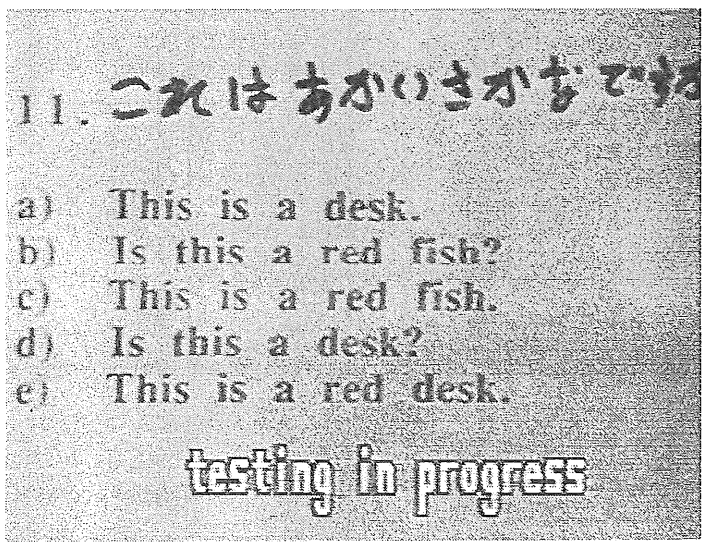

Fig. 3 Sample Japanese I Testing Screen as Viewed on Television

spanning September 1990 through May 1991. As is necessary with most distance learning environments, the content for a particular day had been determined far in advance and weekly lesson plans (see Fig. 1) were mailed to students and facilitators in advance. Most content was delivered verbally by the instructor and accompanied by a printed or handwritten visual aid like that shown in Fig. 2. Portions of tests were also administered through the television screen, as is shown in Fig. 3.

All TI–IN sites are required to have an adult at the local site, with the students, to monitor examinations, check homework, and perform other instructional support duties. This person may have little prior knowledge of the subject being taught. At the University of North Texas site, a native Japanese local site facilitator was present as a subject matter expert (SME) to provide brief explanations and clarify student misunderstandings. The SME facilitator also often provided remediation exercises and live conversation practice for local site students on the topic of study addressed by the instructor. In addition, the SME facilitator occasionally responded to off-line inquiries from the instructor about contemporary student-initiated topics such as Japanese fashion trends, slang expressions, the significance of certain holidays, or dating practices in Japan.

1990–91 Data Collection and Analysis

The project director audited many of the class sessions, conducted interviews with the students approximately once per week, and discussed class activities with the facilitator approximately twice per week throughout the first year of the study. In addition, during March of 1991, two, one-week pilot tests of variations in the subject matter expert theme were carried out, and an interview with the instructor took place. A questionnaire was administered to all students and the facilitator during April of 1991, in which each was asked to indicate his/her preference for the following modes of instruction with respect to every other mode:

1. **TI–IN with normal facilitation,** in which the local site facilitator sits in the classroom with the students, provides administrative assistance such as gathering homework and mailing exams, and sometimes aids in the instruction of the content, but is not a subject matter expert. The students were exposed to this mode for approximately three weeks at the beginning of the school year, before the subject matter expert was hired as the local site facilitator.
2. **TI–IN with local subject matter expert** (SME) facilitation, in which the native Japanese speaker actively followed the instruction delivered by the teacher, immediately clarified small misunderstandings by the students through verbal response or white board illustrations, and occasionally provided supplemental instruction after class.
3. **TI–IN with shared SME** facilitation, in which the students were connected to the subject matter expert via two-way, full-motion video camera (in a nearby room) and both students and facilitator had real time views of the instructor from a second television monitor. This one week experiment was designed to simulate the possible distribution of subject matter experts facilitation to several sites by means of a two-way full-motion link through fiberoptics or other emerging technologies.
4. **TI–IN with SME conversation,** in which the local subject matter expert taught the subject matter outlined by the instructor, in the room with the students, in a conversational mode. This one week experiment was intended to simulate an alternative model (suggested by the instructor) to increase conversational abilities, in which one or two days each week, the local SME facilitator would be encouraged to videotape the in-

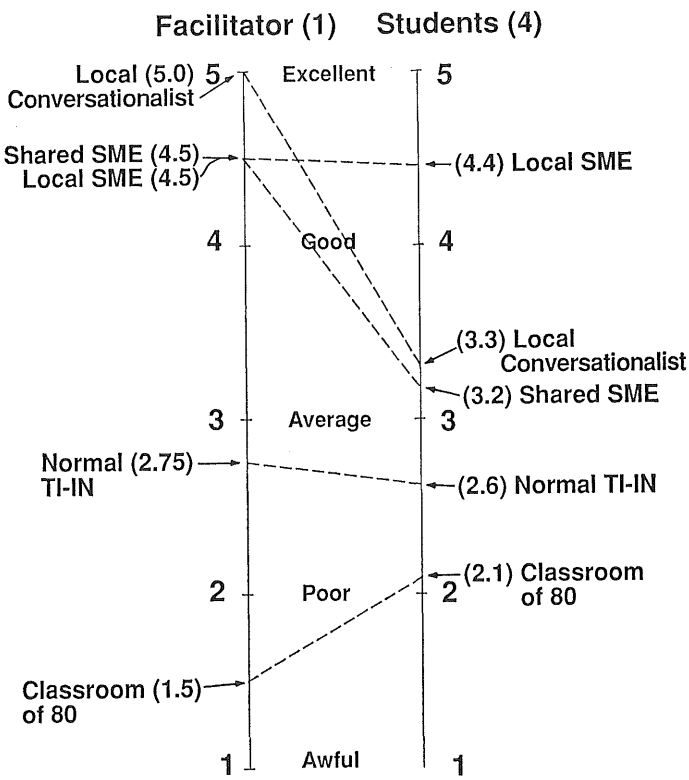

Fig. 4 Japanese I Instructional System Ratings

structor's delivery as supplemental backup material for later viewing, but would teach the content to students in the classroom in a conversational mode.

5. Traditional classroom instruction, a hypothetical alternative which was described to the students as a situation where all 80 students enrolled at sites around the country would be brought to San Antonio and taught in a single classroom by the instructor, in a traditional mode.

Students and the facilitator were asked to rate each mode against all others independently. The average rating for the facilitator, and the combined average ratings for all students, are displayed in Fig. 1.

1990–91 Results

By the end of the 1990–91 school year, the students and the facilitator appear to have favored any TI–IN distance learning alternative over the prospect of a classroom lecture by an instructor to a group of 80 students. The aggregate ratings produced the following rank order of preference: 1) TI–IN w/Local SME, 2) TI–IN w/SME Conversation, 3) TI–IN w/Shared SME, 4) TI–IN w/Normal Facilitator, and 5) Traditional Class of 80.

Additional 1990–91 findings, based primarily upon interviews, were:

1. Students prefer an American instructor,
2. Students like having a native Japanese facilitator,
3. Facilitator teaching skills are as important as Japanese language expertise,
4. An expert facilitator does not have to detract from the instructor,
5. Facilitator cultural anecdotes add interest to the course,
6. Extra time outside class must be allocated to take full advantage of facilitator expertise, and
7. Facilitator expertise especially increases conversational skills.

1991–92 Data Collection and Analysis

Three of the four 1990–91 students graduated from high school at the end of the year, but the one who was a high school junior (11th year) during 1990–91 continued on with Japanese II during 1991–92. The same instructor who had taught the students Japanese I also taught Japanese II. Several of the other Japanese II students had also been enrolled in Japanese I with the North Texas participants during 1990–91.

The major change in the instructional environment for 1991–92 was a return to a typical facilitator format at the local site. This type of facilitation is labeled "TI–IN with normal facilitation" in the categories listed above. As previously mentioned, the 1991–92 facilitator was a university student with no Japanese language expertise. She had served as an occasional substitute facilitator during 1990–91, but, like her two predecessors who were native Japanese facilitators, was not certified to teach in the State of Texas and had no previous training in distance language facilitation or instruction.

Data collection for 1991–92 followed the same general format as 1990–91. The project director occasionally attended class sessions. Discussions with the facilitator took place approximately once per week. Interviews with the student typically took the form of conversations, rather than more formal interviews, as they had been in 1990–91. During May, 1992, both the student and the facilitator completed the same rating forms that had been used during 1990–91. An exit interview with the student and the facilitator was recorded at the end of the course and used for contributions to the overall findings as well.

1990–92 Summative Results

Japanese II was a difficult struggle for the solitary student taking the course at the North Texas site during 1991–92. While all four students completing Japanese I during 1990–91 had received end-of-course ratings near the 90th percentile, the one who continued alone in 1991–92 often had difficulty completing homework and passing exams.

Both student and facilitator gave the instructor high marks at the end of the 1991–92 Japanese II course. The student's perception of the normal mode of TI–IN instruction also greatly improved. Specifically, the student's rating of the normal TI–IN mode advanced from fourth of five possible alternatives in 1990–91 (see Fig. 1), to second of five, trailing only the local SME facilitator mode of instruction.

The student's responses to questions about the " best " and " worst " aspects of his Japanese II course were: best—not having to drive so far to the downlink site because he moved closer to the university; and worst—being alone in class.

Interest in the Japanese language, Japan's people, and its culture remained high at the end of the two-year project. The 1991–92 Japanese II student stated that he would " definitely enroll again," if given the same opportunity, even knowing of his struggles in the course just completed. Two of the three 1990–91 participants went on to study Japanese in college, and the third wished to enroll but the language was not offered at her school.

Discussion

At the onset of this project, some outside observers questioned the wisdom of placing a subject matter expert in the role of a facilitator. The concern was that students would only listen to the native speaker, and never pay attention to the instructor on the television. This was not a major problem. Students sometimes carried on problem-solving or social interaction dialogues, during class, that would not have been welcome in a regular classroom because the " teacher would be watching." Yet, the students clearly understood that they were ultimately accountable to the teacher who would be assigning their grades, and that the facilitator was there to help them accomplish the goals set by the teacher.

The students attributed value to having an American instructor as their beginning-level Japanese teacher. The instructor routinely provided the students with memory aids such as " I like to think of the oars of a row boat to help me remember the character ' *ro*.' " The native language facilitators often observed that they would never have thought of such enabling devices in English. Because the American instructor shared a common culture with his students, he was able to build upon what was already ordinary to them, and help them construct new bridges toward the unknown Japanese language and culture.

The students also perceived value in having a college student as their facilitator. Aside from the new technology, their greatest shock was the realization that they would have to assume responsibility for paying attention during class, completing homework, and studying areas where they were weak. The facilitators were able to transfer study skills to the secondary school students that they themselves had to master in order to excel in college.

The students did not perceive much value in the high technology aids prepared by the laboratory staff and the facilitators for them. For example, every class was videotaped and catalogued to allow review. Students seldom took a tape home, even after they missed a class. The only popular tapes were those containing reviews for final exams. Similarly, a set of Macintosh Computer Hypercard stacks containing digitized native-language pronunciations of words and phrases went largely unused. Flashcards made from stock mailed by the teacher were more popular, as was the vocabulary drill tape produced by having the project director read each English word, and following it

with the Japanese equivalent pronounced by a native speaker. The students listened to this tape while they were driving to and from class.

The students greatly appreciated the native facilitators' abilities to immediately remove learning frustrations, often by writing a character or phrase on the whiteboard, without speaking. They also enjoyed the sense of Japanese culture conveyed to them by the native language facilitators. This ranged from subtle realizations such as " even highly educated Japanese people have trouble pronouncing the English letter, ' r,' " to profound realizations about high cultural standards. For example, it was difficult at first for the students to comprehend how the facilitator would deem it a " failure worthy of resignation " when students received B and C marks, rather than A's, on a major exam.

CONCLUSION

The delivery system studied in this project fosters and requires the development of self-directed learning skills like those found in good college students. However, the introductory level, culture-bound content appears to benefit most from teaching aids (nursery rhymes, songs, flashcards, games, origami, audiocassettes, etc.) like those employed for teaching Japanese to primary school students (Kiss, 1991). In some sense, then, American secondary school students studying Japanese as a foreign language via a distance learning system, should be treated as much younger than their age with respect to modes of instruction, and more mature than the norm for their age with respect to their responsibilities for self-teaching and learning.

The hybrid distance learning system pilot tested in this study appears to be useful and replicable. It should be especially suitable for implementation at sites where nearby universities are likely to bring international students into the community. This paper has focused on the instruction of American students, but the concept should be applicable in other nations as well.

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