

Developing Resource Materials for Australian Schools – Teacher talk in the primary Japanese classroom

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[Key Words] primary LOTE, teacher talk, teacher resources, awareness raising, checklist

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Introduction

Primary Japanese language education in Australia is a relatively new phenomenon, and little research has been done in this area. From 1995 we lecturers at the Japan Foundation Sydney Language Centre (SLC) have visited a number of schools and observed lessons. From our initial observations we noted that there was a wide variety in teaching styles and practices including the type and amount of talk by teachers in Japanese.

This report takes up the recommendation made in a previous study (Negishi and Jonak 1997) which investigated the teacher talk (TT) in primary school Japanese classrooms in Australia. The study found that although use of the target language in TT was regarded as highly important by the teachers, in practice they only used a limited amount of target language in their lesson. Teachers stated they often decided to use English in order to avoid a loss of control in class.

Furukawa (1998) then conducted a follow-up study analysing a number of primary Japanese lessons. Based on this, and on teacher inservice sessions we have been conducting on classroom use of the target language, we have developed resource materials designed to promote use of the target language in the

classroom. These materials have been designed using an integrated approach to raise awareness of Japanese TT together with equipping teachers to use it effectively, through an ongoing decision making process.

1. General background

The rapid growth of Japanese in Australia has been well documented, and has sometimes been referred to as the 'Nihongo Boom' or 'Tsunami'. According to the Japan Foundation Japanese Language Institute survey in 1993, Australia has the third highest number of learners of Japanese in the world after South Korea and China, and per capita it has the second highest number. Of these learners, 90% are in primary and secondary school. Even now in this time of economic depression, numbers of students of Japanese are growing, particularly at primary level.

In 1994, it was reported that there are more than 60,000 primary school students who were studying Japanese, which represented 1/3 of students who were studying Japanese in Australia (Shimazu 1996). Further, Furukawa reported a rapid growth in numbers as follows:

Table 1

	New South Wales	Victoria	Queensland
1995	47,000	25,000	27,000
1997	56,000	46,000	49,700

(Furukawa 1998:36)

School language education in Australia, of which Japanese language education is a part, encompasses the study of community languages as well as foreign languages. Community languages are languages brought to Australia by immigrants as well as the languages of Aboriginal communities, and are taught in keeping with a policy of promoting understanding of Australia's different cultural groups and a recognition of their languages as a valuable resource. Some language learners are therefore maintaining their background language, while others are studying a new language, and in both cases cultural understanding is seen as an integral part of school language education. All languages apart from English in the context of school study are referred to as LOTE (Languages Other Than English) and Japanese occupies a unique position as the most popular foreign language.

There is a growing recognition in Australia of the importance of the study of languages in primary education. Primary LOTE education is now promoted in all states, and national and state LOTE policies set language awareness and language proficiency as major goals of school language education. However, this

rapid growth in LOTE at primary level has created an urgent demand for primary teachers of LOTE, and for Japanese teachers in particular.

From the 1997 SLC survey on primary Japanese teachers we noted that there is a wide range in teachers' experience and Japanese language qualifications. Teachers' Japanese language qualifications ranged from near beginners to teachers with a university major in Japanese. (Jonak and Negishi 1997)

In Australia, most primary teachers are Australian teachers who are non-native speakers of Japanese. In the early stages, the teachers who began teaching Japanese were generalist teachers*¹ who had taken a basic Japanese course or visited Japan in the past, and they were not trained in either LOTE teaching or Japanese language. These teachers are still teaching while trying to develop their language skills as they go. More recently some Diploma of Education courses have produced graduates with a primary teaching qualification as well as Japanese language and/or LOTE methodology, such as the Macquarie University Dip. Ed. Course. Most commonly, LOTE in primary school is taught by specialist teachers from either a primary or a secondary background, who teach a number of classes within a school or across several schools. (The 1997 SLC survey showed that out of 213 respondents 72% of primary Japanese teachers were specialist teachers and 28% of teachers were generalist teachers.) Among the 213 teachers, as well as the range in proficiency (except in Queensland which requires foreign language teachers to have attained adequate levels of proficiency in the four macroskills) there was also a wide range in LOTE teaching methodology qualifications.

In response to this sudden growth in Japanese language learning at primary level, the Departments of Education in the various states as well as teachers' associations have been conducting professional development courses and inservices for primary teachers aimed at developing teachers' language proficiency and LOTE methodology. One example is the Primary LOTE Intensive Methodology Course conducted by the NSW Dept of Education. The SLC has also been conducting primary inservice seminars in cooperation with these departments and associations since 1995. In order to provide better courses and develop appropriate resources, we investigated areas of need through observation of classes, surveys and review of documents.

We found that the Departments of Education in the various states are in the process of developing syllabuses for primary school Japanese, but as yet only NSW has produced a syllabus, and it is optional. Detailed guidelines directly applicable to the classroom are scarce in all states, and we noted a wide variation in teaching content and teaching practices, including the language used by teachers, as teachers are making decisions on their own on what and how to teach. This led us to conduct a survey of primary teachers' teacher talk in the Japanese classroom.

*¹ Generalist teachers are teachers who have a general primary school teaching qualification and teach the whole primary curriculum.

2. Specific background

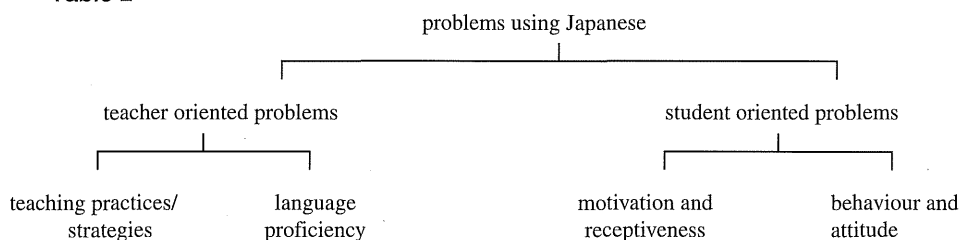
The Australian Language Level (ALL) Guidelines (1988), which set out a curriculum framework for school language learning, state that 'An important source of communicative data for classroom learners is "teacher talk" in the target language' (p. 23: Book 3). Whilst the majority of teachers in the survey that we conducted in 1997 recognised the importance of using the target language, 50% of the respondent teachers estimated that the target language made up 30% or less of their classroom TT, and it was mainly used for very basic functions such as greetings and basic instructions. A number of teachers stated that it is better to give explanations for tasks and activities in English, and some also stated the need to use English in order to control the class, as both take too much time in the target language.

In many cases, teachers tended to teach culture focused lessons. 'Culture' in the primary context usually means teaching about customs and cultural events. It usually involves craft-oriented activities which are conducted in English, resulting in lessons where hardly any target language other than one or two key words and basic greetings is used.

An issue raised by some respondents was that children feel threatened by too much target language. A number of teachers stated that their students do not understand them when they speak in Japanese, and often 'switch off'. Moreover, teachers also raised concerns regarding their lack of teaching strategies and language proficiency. (We define teaching strategies here as planning, preparation and classroom management of learning.)

Negishi and Jonak (1997) classified the problems of using Japanese in teacher talk into two main categories, student oriented and teacher oriented problems. (See Table 2)

Table 2



(Negishi and Jonak 1997)

We will now look more closely at how these problems occur. Whether teachers use TT in Japanese or not depends on teachers' decision making. Woods(1996) attempted to model the process of teacher's 'decision-making'. He pointed out that teachers make their decisions during the lesson based on their understanding of the teaching situation including the aim of the lesson, learner's needs, learner's readiness, teaching strat-

egies, their background knowledge of the teaching area and their beliefs about teaching and learning. In the actual lesson a range of problems can occur, such as students showing lack of motivation or a negative attitude, refusing to listen etc. When faced with such student oriented problems in the classroom, it can be assumed that teachers often make the decision not to use Japanese (instructional use in Japanese) because they believe it is important to keep the class under control (managerial use in English). Their decision is possibly reinforced by their lack of confidence in their proficiency and teaching strategies. There are no established guidelines for instructional and managerial use of Japanese to deal with such problems, and as a result teachers tend to choose to use only the activities or language that they can control with ease.

Richards (1994) states that teaching is essentially a thinking process, and breaks down this process into three stages of teacher decision making: planning decisions, interactive decisions and evaluative decisions. Teachers make decisions about language use spontaneously in class (interactive decisions), but many also make such decisions in their planning. In particular, teachers with low proficiency may plan to use a limited amount of Japanese in order to avoid an uncontrollable situation. This may also lead to the tendency to teach culturally focused lessons using English.

It is not appropriate to say whether a lesson focusing on 'culture' is good or bad, but if the aim of foreign language classrooms in primary LOTE education is to teach language and raise language awareness, then the way that teachers make such decisions needs to be changed. In order to change the way that teachers make their decisions in class, they first need to be aware of what factors lead to the success of a language lesson, and then they need to develop the skills to put them into practice.

3. Teaching strategies and modification of TT.

Furukawa(1998) stated the importance for all teachers, regardless of proficiency, of developing teaching strategies which provide a framework they can use in class. She observed a number of teaching strategies that were used by primary school teachers:

- 1 to establish classroom routines which give the learners a sense of security about the procedure in the classroom
- 2 to give students choices in their learning which leads to greater motivation
- 3 to use visual teaching aids
- 4 to relate to students' experience and background
- 5 to control the class by moving the students around
- 6 to explain activities by showing and telling

(Furukawa 1998:48-9)

As well as teaching strategies, teachers use a number of modification strategies to promote learners' understanding. Ellis (1996) states that teachers modify their speech when addressing L2 learners in the classroom in a number of ways and also that they are sensitive to their learners' general proficiency level. Ellis noted that TT has attracted attention because of its potential effect on learners' comprehension, which has been hypothesised to be important for second language acquisition. However little is known about what constitutes optimal modification and it is not even clear on what basis teachers make their modification. Chaudron(1988) noted that modification in classroom TT in the target language may be important, to the extent that it would enhance learners' comprehension and consequent ability to process the target language grammar and lexis. Chaudron showed examples of findings concerning teachers' speech to lower level non-native speakers:

- 1 Rate of speech appears to be slower
- 2 Pauses which may be evidence of the speaker planning more, are possibly more frequent and longer
- 3 Pronunciation tends to be exaggerated and simplified
- 4 Vocabulary use in more basic
- 5 Degree of subordination is lower
- 6 More declarative statements are used than questions
- 7 Teachers may self-repeat more frequently

(Chaudron 1988:85)

In our study we analysed transcripts of five lessons conducted by two teachers who used a high percentage of Japanese in their TT*², focusing on:

- (1) the modification made by the teachers to their TT
- (2) the strategies applied by teachers relating to TT

From our study the following sentence level modifications in TT were identified:

- (1) short utterances
- (2) frequent repetition in lexis
- (3) frequent use of imperative and interrogative

The lessons were conducted mainly in Japanese. This means that even with limited lexis, it is possible to conduct a lesson in the target language. It was found that the teachers were applying certain strategies to explain and manage classroom activities.

*² The lessons transcribed were videotaped in 1996 in NSW and Victoria. For details see Furukawa(1998).

- (1) frequent questioning to check comprehension eg. 'nan desu ka.' 'ii desu ka.'
- (2) modeling and repeating
- (3) proceeding through the activity in simple steps and providing clear directions

eg.

Teacher	Students
せん、かいて、おやゆびで	
draw a line with your thumb	
うえにこすって、	S1 : うえにこすって
rub upwards	rub upwards
みんなで、うえにこすって、	S(chorus) : うえにこすって
everyone together rub upwards	rub upwards
うえにこすって、	S(chorus) : うえにこすって
rub upwards	rub upwards
シー、つぎ	
quiet, next	
(demonstrate) せん、かいて	S(chorus) : せん、かいて
draw a line	draw a line
	S2 : した
	down
(nod) したに	
downwards	
はい、したにこすって	S1 : したにこすって eh..
yes, rub, downwards	rub downwards
シー、もういちど	
quiet, once more	
せん、かいて、みんなで	S(chorus) : せん、かいて
draw a line everyone together	draw a line

This is a craft activity making a Japanese New Year's greeting card by using the 'sumie' (drawing with black ink) technique. The teacher prepared a simple set of instructions in Japanese to explain the steps of the procedure, and she asked students to repeat it in a chant. In the following lesson, the teacher used the same instruction method to teach how to cook 'okonomiyaki' (Japanese pancake).

The teacher talk in the activities of (3) are both examples of modification of discourse which is systematically planned prior to the lesson. This type of modification of discourse can be broken down into the following stages:

- (1) think through the steps of the activity
- (2) simplify the content
- (3) choose the target language words from the syllabus or make a word list

In our teacher training seminars, we often set tasks involving teachers in giving instructions for certain activities. Interestingly, we often see that fluent non-native speakers give complicated explanations, and native Japanese speakers have difficulty simplifying their language. This indicates that modifying instruction discourse is a universal instructional skill.

Another important point is that both teachers were not only using Japanese in various functions such as greetings, managing the classroom, giving feedback and disciplining, but they were also responding spontaneously in Japanese to events that occurred during the lessons. Teachers need to be alert for opportunities to use spontaneous talk in the target language, and in teacher A's lesson, she was taking advantage of every possible opportunity to do so. This spontaneous use of Japanese broadens the range of functions used and is crucial for creating a natural Japanese communicative environment in class. Whilst it is possible for us to prepare a suggested list of classroom language for teachers, we can only guess what will happen in the classroom and it is impossible to cover all eventualities. It is therefore very important that teachers reflect on their own TT to create opportunities for spontaneous language use.

Although the lessons were mostly conducted in Japanese, TT in English was also observed several times in both teachers' lessons. English was found to be used in the following functions:

- (1) translating /explaining a new word
- (2) explaining the cultural background for songs / activities
- (3) explaining an activity procedure
- (4) controlling the class
- (5) praising

In functions (1) - (4) the teachers used English to get across a complicated message more quickly. In function (5) the teachers used English in a limited number of situations where a student had answered a question correctly and the teacher had wanted to show solidarity with that particular student (Furukawa 1998). In summary it seems that the use of English may facilitate learning, and in certain situations English cannot be replaced by Japanese. However, Clyne(1995) noted that too much code switching 'can have the effect of encouraging the children to "switch off" instead of "on" when L2 is used (p. 158)'.

All of the above strategies are applied according to teachers' decisions, either planned or interactive,

about when and how to use the target language. By raising their awareness of TT, teachers are better able to make such strategic decisions about their language use.

4. Specification of Resource Materials

As part of our Activity Resource Program*³, we have produced a resource designed to promote use of the target language in the classroom. From our study we found that to increase target language TT in classrooms it is important for teachers to be ready and able to use both planned and spontaneous talk; in other words, teachers need to always be aware of the lesson process as well as of the communicative use of Japanese. This awareness would enable teachers to make decisions about using Japanese at any point during the lesson. In developing materials for teachers we needed to produce tasks for raising this kind of awareness, and for this we include checklists.

Furthermore to increase Japanese TT in the classroom, materials need to present practicable teaching strategies. We identified modification of activity instruction discourse as one such strategy. These types of teaching strategies are also included in the materials.

4. 1 Outline of contents of resource

This resource takes the form of a booklet with the following contents, which are explained in detail below:

Introduction

Unit 1 - Simple classroom language

Unit 2 - Explaining games and activities

Unit 3 - Language of social interaction

Introduction

The introduction gives a rationale for the use of TT in the target language based on language acquisition theory and practice. It also includes a list of functions commonly used in the classroom, to raise awareness of classroom language.

Unit 1 - Simple classroom language

The first unit deals with everyday classroom functions including greetings, taking roll call, basic instructions, praising/giving feedback and scolding/disciplining. It also introduces functions of student talk such

*³ From 1994 the Japan Foundation Sydney Language Centre has been producing teaching resources for use in Australian schools in the form of booklets.

as clarification requests and asking permission. The functions were chosen so that the teacher could enable students to become used to and accept the target language in the classroom from the very beginning of their study of Japanese.

Unit 2 - Explaining Games and Activities

This unit deals with specific instructions and/or explanation of the steps of a game or activity. These functions were chosen because games and activities are an integral part of teaching and learning in the primary language classroom. This unit aims to help the teacher to develop the necessary instructional skill of modifying discourse.

Unit 3 - Social interaction

This unit aims to develop questioning skills in Japanese, from simple yes/no questions or choice questions to questions which elicit sentence level answers. Questions are vital for establishing interaction in the classroom, and are a first step which facilitates 'chatting' with students. This creates a Japanese communicative environment which in turn leads teachers to take advantage of opportunities to use the target language spontaneously.

4. 2 Outline and explanation of a unit of work

Each unit consists of five sections; a starting point checklist, suggested procedure and key language, suggested activities, student talk and a progress checklist.

(1) Starting point checklist

The starting point checklist provides the opportunity for teachers to reflect on and analyse their current approaches and strategies in the use of teacher talk in Japanese. It enables them to consider any possible changes or improvements they could make, and to evaluate their use of Japanese and their performance in class. By using this checklist as a starting point, the teacher can set clear personal goals.

(Example from Unit 1 - Simple Classroom Language)

Tick how often you use the following techniques in the classroom

	Never	Sometimes	Usually
Greet the class in Japanese on the first day			
Introduce yourself to the class in Japanese on the first day			
Take roll call in Japanese			
Start the lesson in Japanese			
Bring the lesson to an end in Japanese			
Describe the class's reaction when you started the first lesson in Japanese, and when you started it English.			
What are the advantages of the two different approaches?			

(2) Suggested procedure and key language of TT

This section provides a procedure for applying specific TT to the classroom situation, and includes methodology and example expressions.

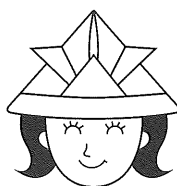
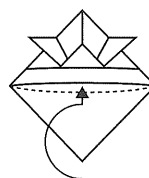
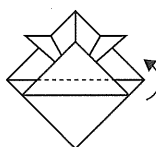
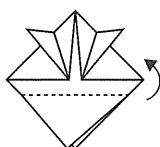
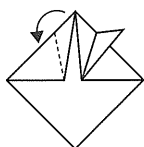
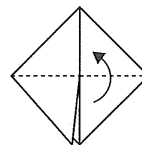
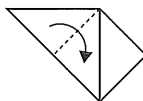
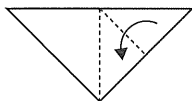
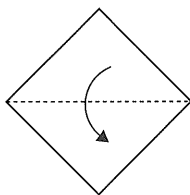
(Example from Unit 2 - Explaining games and activities)

Planning Phase

Think about the fact that you are explaining an activity and at the same time teaching the language! In this example, your objective is to familiarise students with the language of explaining how to make an origami item.

1 Before the lesson, think through the steps of the activity or game.

ORIGAMI - Making a 'kabuto' - samurai warrior's helmet



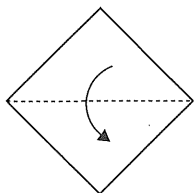
2 Decide what key phrases or expressions are necessary for this activity. It is better to use the same expressions as often as possible to avoid overloading learners with too many different expressions. Simplify the explanation and omit inessential language. Remember that you can often replace words with a non-verbal explanation by demonstration. Be aware of which Japanese key phrases you may want to focus on in the activity.

eg. hold the paper (not essential - can be demonstrated)

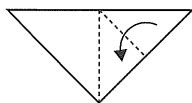
fold into a triangle (key phrase?)

fold along the centre line (not essential - can be replaced by 'fold into a triangle' as above)

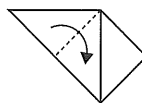
3 Choose the key phrases you will focus on in the activity - keep it simple!



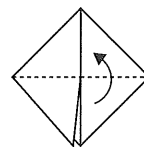
さんかくにおって



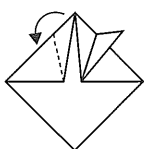
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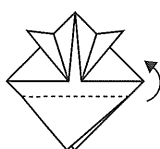
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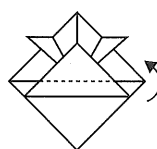
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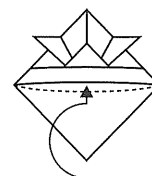
さんかくにおって



さんかくにおって



もういちどおって



なかにおって



できあがり

NOTE

Three to four expressions are enough for beginners. At a later stage when this language has been acquired you can build on it to introduce more language.

Teaching Phase

- 1 Start by stating clearly to the learners what activity you will be doing.
eg, おりがみをしましょう。

- 2 During the course of the activity you can involve the students in the explanation by asking them to repeat what you say. You may use a technique like chanting. This technique has the added advantage that the whole class is involved and no learner will be left behind.

eg. Teacher: さんかくにおいて、Learners: さんかくにおいて

TASK

Follow the procedure above to prepare a lesson on playing a card game.

(3) Student talk

This section covers the student talk related to the above TT. In the communicative classroom, the ideal situation is for communication to occur both ways. It lists example expressions and gives guidelines for introducing and reinforcing these through activities and songs.

(Example from Unit 1 - Simple Classroom Language)

Here are two songs for learning classroom expressions - please sing along!

(to the tune of 'London Bridge is Falling Down')

- 1 トイレにいてもいいですか、いいですか、いいですか、
トイレにいてもいいですか、
はい、いいですよ。
- 2 おくれてすみません、すみません、すみません、
おくれてすみません、
はい、いいですよ。
- 3 うちにかえってもいいですか、いいですか、いいですか、
うちにかえってもいいですか、
いいえ、だめですよ。

(to the tune of 'Battle Hymn of the Republic')

- 1 せんせい、ちょっとわかりません、repeat three times
せんせい、えいごでなんですか。
- 2 せんせい、ぜんぜんわかりません、repeat three times
せんせい、えいごでなんですか。
- 3 せんせい、えんぴつわすれました、repeat three times
せんせい、えんぴつかしてください。

- 4 せんせい、しゅくだいわすれました、repeat three times
せんせい、あしたでもいいですか。

(4) Suggested activities

This section provides a number of activities for introducing and reinforcing the language presented.

(Example from Unit 1 - Simple Classroom Language)

Here are some suggestions for introducing and reinforcing classroom expressions.

- 1 flash card (Japan Foundation Flash Cards) games eg. Ningen sugoroku
- 2 hand card games eg. snap (karuta)
- 3 TPR (Total Physical Response)
- 4 songs eg. Greetings Song (to the tune of 'Frere Jacques')

おはよう、おはよう、
こんにちは、こんにちは、
さようなら、さようなら、
またあした、またあした。

Instruction Song (to the tune of 'Pick a Bale of Cotton')

どうぞ、はいて、ドアをしめて、
たって、すわって、きいてください。
しずかにして、こくばんをみて、
ノートにかいて、おぼえてください。

- 5 wall chart

Make a chart of the most common classroom expressions and display it in the Japanese classroom.

The expressions can be written in Japanese and English or in Japanese with pictures.

(5) Progress checklist

This checklist provides a chance for the teacher to reflect on their classroom practice after a period of time, and to become aware of change or improvement in use of teacher talk and student response. It enables teachers to maintain a clear idea of what they have or have not achieved and it helps them analyse any problems and set further goals.

(Example from Unit 1 - Simple Classroom Language)

Write down the expressions you have used in class for the following:

	Date	Expressions
Greet the class in Japanese		
Introduce yourself to the class in Japanese		
Take roll call in Japanese		
Start the lesson in Japanese		
Bring the lesson to an end in Japanese		
Write down which instructions the class found most difficult. If you had a problem, describe what strategies you used to get the meaning across		
Write down the instructions in English which you could not say in Japanese. Find the relevant Japanese word or expression		

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This resource is the cumulation of material from a number of inservice sessions we have conducted in response to a perceived need in the area of classroom teacher talk. At these inservices we gave out various materials with lists of classroom expressions etc., but we didn't know how or even if the teachers used them when they took them home. Sometimes teachers eagerly receive handouts, use them as they are, but do not consider the possibilities of adapting them or applying them in another way. In other words, the materials do not seem to generate further development in the teacher. We have always been highly aware that each teacher's needs are different, just as the needs of the students they teach are different. Our starting question always was, 'How can we help teachers to gain the ability to adapt materials to their specific needs?'

With these resource materials we aim to enable teachers to gain such an ability. These materials are multi-layered, as they include tasks for teachers themselves, as well as activities for students. The check-lists for teachers that we propose here are an attempt to trigger fresh thought in teachers about their practices as language teachers and about target language use in the classroom. Ultimately we hope that these resource materials will be instrumental in creating interactive target language use in the primary classroom.

However, they have a number of limitations.

Firstly there is the fact that this is a paper resource. Support material in the form of an audiotape would help low proficiency teachers with pronunciation, and audio-visual support material would be a useful backup for teachers of all proficiency levels as it would illustrate the actual implementation of the teaching strategies.

Secondly there is the difficulty for classroom teachers of incorporating these awareness raising and action taking procedures into their busy work schedule and staying on task without regular feedback. One way of supporting the teachers would be to use the resource as part of an ongoing workshop, where the SLC held a seminar to introduce the resource concepts, kept open a line of communication with the teachers, monitored their progress and gave feedback.

Furthermore, teachers with high proficiency may not perceive the need to use this resource, thinking they already use Japanese in class. Alternatively, some teachers may not consider TT in the target language as important, reflecting their beliefs about language learning, and lack of theoretical knowledge. We have included theoretical background information on language learning and acquisition in the introduction of the resource, but we still have to continue to raise awareness of this issue at future teacher inservices.

Finally, in the resource we focused mainly on TT, but we also included some strategies for facilitating the students' use of Japanese. Teacher-student and student-student interaction in the target language is a major issue in second language learning and teaching. With this resource as a starting point, we are planning to work with teachers through networks and workshops on this area of interactive use of the target language in the classroom. Further analysis of classroom language in consultation with practising teachers should yield information and ideas to enable us to assist teachers with this complex issue.

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