

A Multimedia Courseware for Japanese Language Learning

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Summary

This paper introduces a new multimedia courseware for Japanese language learning developed as a fruit of the joint research project by The Japan IBM Co., The NHK Educational Co. and the author from Tohoku University. This material in one CD-ROM disk with 24 digitized video skits focuses on developing learners' abilities of coping with various situations in Japan even if their knowledge and skills in Japanese are limited. Some ideas on having this type of "self-access" material work as a classroom activity resource are also discussed.

1. Introduction

With the development of both hardware and software, the language teaching environment has greatly changed. It is now technically possible to integrate colorful animation or authentic scenes from video movies into language learning materials. While allowing teachers more freedom in designing materials, the multimedia environment raises an issue of how we can effectively utilize it in developing materials.

A new CD-ROM title, "Japanese: Daily Conversation for Beginners", can be of the stimulus to discuss this issue. This multimedia courseware on the WINDOWS has been developed under the joint research project. The IBM Japan provides technical resources, and the NHK Educational handles the video and sound resources together with the screen design. The author is responsible for the curriculum design and the explanation on Japanese language.

It is one of the first material for Japanese language learning that contains digitized video skits on a CD-ROM. It is primarily designed to give

novice learners a clear view of how Japanese language is used in various situations which they will definitely come across in Japan.

2. Technical information and the system requirements

For the programming, Visual Basic and C language are used. Video resources are digitized using the Video for Windows version 1.1 and the video skits are played in the rate of 15 frames per a second.

A personal computer whose CPU is faster than i486DX2 50MHz and has 8MB or more memory, with a double speed CD-ROM drive and a video card of 640x480 dot and 256 color mode is necessary. As an operating system, Microsoft Windows 3.1 is employed. Since all the Japanese letters appeared on the screen have made into graphic data, no Japanese font is required. A WINDOWS support sound software should also be installed.

3. Characteristics of the courseware

The main features of the courseware are briefly described below.

1) Natural language resources

As the Figure 1 shows, 12 topics with 24 digitized video skits present a wide range of natural expressions to help learners to get used to the Japanese communication styles.

2) Communication strategies

The material shows learners a lot of examples of the uses of communication strategies that helps them to cope with various real life situations with rather limited vocabulary and expressions.

3) Free of access

Learners can stroll about the courseware as they like. Since all 12 topics are self-contained, a learner can start learning Japanese from the topic which he/she thinks most relevant and necessary.

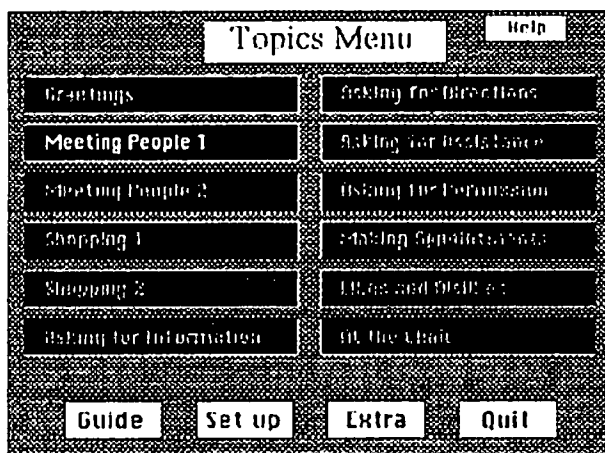


Figure 1. Topic Menu screen

4) Transcriptions

Considering the diversity of the learner needs, the courseware transcribes the conversation in two different writing systems. For the learners who would like to focus on oral communication, the romanized transcription is prepared. For those who want to study the Japanese way of writing as well, transcriptions in Japanese ordinary writing style with hiragana, katakana and kanji characters will help their study.

5) Practices

On each lesson screen, as shown in Figure 2, a "repeat" and a "role play" function buttons are placed beside the video screen. Using these functions, a learner can practice the phrases and expressions in the conversation by repeating line by line or by taking one of the roles in the skit. If the hardware has recording facilities, it is also possible to make the "repeat" function to "record" and to play back one's own performance on the role.

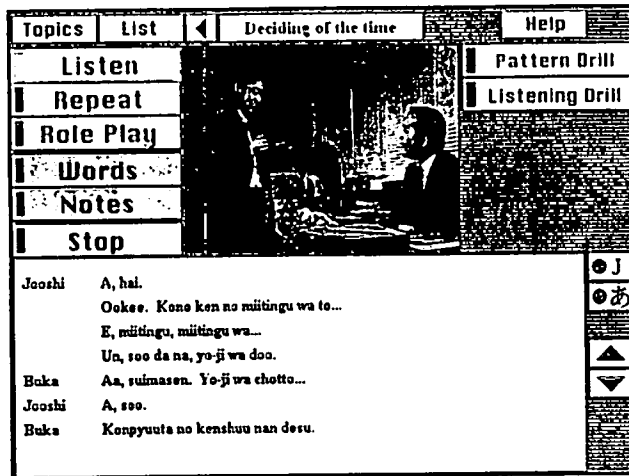


Figure 2. Video skit screen with function buttons

6) Drills

Two kinds of drills: pattern drill and listening drill are equipped where necessary. The pattern drill handles a key expression in the topic. It is a simple substitution drill, but since the cue words for it are shown in comprehensive pictures, a learner can expand his/her vocabulary through the drill. The listening drill encourage the use of a strategy to pick up the needed information from the flow of natural conversation.

7) Grammatical information

Some learners prefer to approach foreign language learning by understanding its grammatical rules, while others like to learn without being bothered by the rules. For those who want to have the systematic explanations on basic syntactical feature of Japanese, verb conjugation rules, honorific and humble form systems and so forth, some information are provided under the Extra function to allow learners refer to them whenever needed.

8) Prosody information

In oral communication, prosody is quite important to convey the intended meaning. When a learner presses Notes button to access explanation on

phrasal or clausal expression, the intonation pattern of the expression is shown by a red line on the hiragana writing of that target expression as shown in Figure 3.

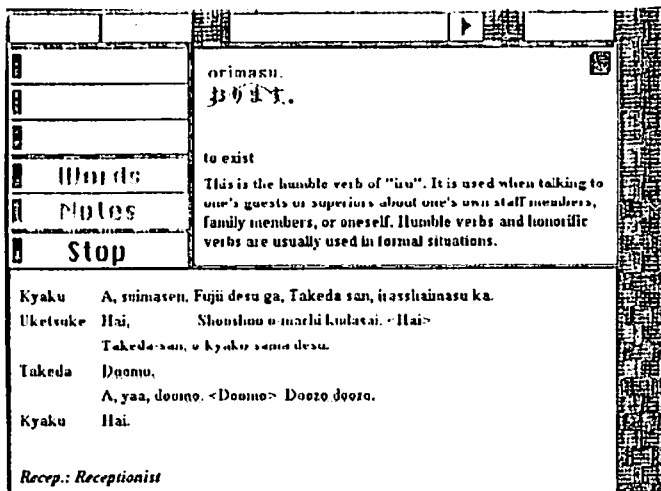


Figure 3. The prosody indication on the Notes screen

9) User interface

Written instruction to use the courseware seldom appears on the screen, because it might irritate the user when one gets used to the program. Every topic has the same format lest the learners should get lost in the courseware. Beautifully designed screen with its consistency tells learners which function is available on the spot.

4. Classroom use

Although this courseware has been developed primarily for the self-access study material for the survival level, it also has good possibilities to be introduced to the classroom as the stimulus provider for group activities. If one personal computer and a projector are available, the video skits in the CD-ROM can be used as role play models, discussion starters, resources to expand the conversation and so forth. The listening drills can also be good

resources to develop classroom activities such as task listenings, awareness raising activities for sociolinguistic phase, etc..

5. Future perspective

The multimedia material for Japanese language learning has just started to be developed and to be used in language courses, while it can be a powerful tool to make the learning environment more real, interactive, and interesting. Developing such a material, however, requires lots of time, energy and resources and it does not seem to be a good idea for every teacher to devote all his/her time to the multimedia material development that exactly fits to the class. What we need now best is innovative users of this kind of materials. Before we have come to enjoy various multimedia materials in teaching and learning Japanese language, it will be most needed to have innovative and critical users of the materials in this newly developing category.

reference

- KAWAZOE, Yoshiyuki and SAITA, Izumi 1994 "Multimedia and Japanese Language Teaching", *Humanities and Computers* 23-8. vol. 94, No.78. pp57-62.
SAITA, Izumi 1995 "A Multimedia Courseware for Japanese Language Learning", A paper presented at Biennial Conference of Japanese Studies Association of Australia.