

Teaching Japanese to Missionaries

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One type of Japanese as specific purposes is teaching Japanese to missionaries. This paper discusses how the curriculum Japanese for missionary's specific purpose was designed, how the material was developed, and in what way they differ from Japanese for general purposes.

First, we looked into the history of Japanese language teaching and learning to know who missionaries were. We found that both Jesuit missionaries who came to Japan in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and Protestant missionaries who came in the nineteenth century studied Japanese and wrote Japanese grammar books and dictionaries, and translated the Bible into Japanese.

Next we looked into the post war missionaries who looked for a better way to become literate in Japanese. They also needed to know religious vocabulary in Japanese. Brannen, N. S., a missionary and linguist wrote a textbook based on the audiolingual method. The textbook emphasized all four skills and also had one section in each chapter for learning religious vocabulary. Missionaries evaluated this textbook highly. However, in the late eighties, they started to look for an alternative which would make them more communicative in their specific field from the beginning.

The school administrators decided to redesign the curriculum for Japanese for specific purpose. They carried out needs survey with the students and former students. We found that they needed knowledge of 1) language for attending church, 2) formulaic expressions used in prayer, 3) words and phrases used in holding worship service and evangelical meeting, 4) words and phrases used in church committee meetings. The school requested the teachers to develop material that met the students' needs.

The teachers designed and developed the program called Church Life Program (CLP). It has three parts; Church Life, Prayer and Evangelism. Church Life is the practical application of what was learned in classroom, whereas Prayer and Evangelism are tasks to do in the classroom. Among those tasks and materials are prayers, religious vocabulary list, testimony writing, Bible story retelling, home evangelism simulation, and so forth.

Two of the materials we designed are described below.

There are 219 words in the religious vocabulary list. Checking them against the vocabulary list of Japanese proficiency test levels, we found that 110 (50%) words did not fall under any of the proficiency test levels.

In order to analyze 219 words in respect of their specificity, we divided them into 6 groups: a) theological and religious terms, b) vocabulary mainly used in the Christian community which is hard for non-Christians to understand, c) religious words everybody understands, d) generic terms which carry a different meaning when used in the Christian context, e) religious terms widely accepted in Japanese society, f) generic terms. a) through d) are technical terms and e) and f) are generic terms. We analyzed and found that about half of the words fell into technical term groups.

We designed other tasks to help the students to participate and minister in the church community. We designed some of the tasks to enhance reading and writing skills needed in the community.

We analyzed the material used for “Home Evangelism” simulation task from the point of view of discourse. The students take the role of a missionary and participants in this task. The missionary 1) receives guests, 2) opens the meeting 2) leads devotion (prayer, Bible reading, singing hymns,) 3) appoints, 4) explains, 5) changes topics and 6) closes the meeting. Because the curriculum is designed to integrate all skills learned in CLP, the students gain confidence in language use from this task.

One year after the implementation of CLP, we received positive feedback from the students on the religious vocabulary list and the material for prayers. Some students made remarks that they were able to learn about the present situation of Japanese churches. Some students, however, felt they didn’t have enough time to thoroughly carry out all the tasks.

We have developed and implemented the program that facilitates missionaries to participate in church and minister to Japanese. We concluded that the program had met the learners’ needs. We need to add, however, that we should always be ready to develop material that would meet their needs even better.

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