

JAPANESE ONLINE SELF-HELP UTILITY DEVELOPED WITH STUDENTS FOR STUDENTS

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Abstract: The JOSHU site provides online language references and interactive exercises and games as well as cultural information. Japanese-language students have been involved in developing this site utilizing innovative technology to accelerate students' acquisition of Japanese language and culture and to motivate them to become self-propelling learners.

Keyword: online exercise, study-help, supplementary teaching materials

INTRODUCTION

Learning Japanese requires strong commitment and discipline on the part of students, and it also requires a great deal of time. Students have so much to learn within the limited time available in class. By utilizing computer technology, we can provide online language references and interactive language exercises/games as well as cultural information to accelerate students' acquisition of Japanese and to motivate them to become self-propelling learners. Students can also greatly benefit by getting involved in developing online material.

This paper describes the development of the JOSHU (**J**apanese **O**nline **S**elf-**H**elp **U**tility) site (<http://www.laits.utexas.edu/japanese/joshu>) and how it is used.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

JOSHU was initially developed by a student for her senior thesis (Puthaaron, 2004), and many other students in our Japanese program, including student technology assistants (STAs) hired with an IT grant from the University of Texas at Austin, have been involved in modifying and expanding the site by assisting in technical aspects, inputting data, and donating pictures and video clips of Japan. Students' works produced as class projects in the second and third years are also integrated into JOSHU.

JOSHU contains: (1) a variety of interactive Kana, Kanji, and vocabulary flashcards, exercises, and games; (2) grammar references and exercises; and (3) Japanese culture and customs pages.

Kanji and vocabulary flashcards (see Figure 1) are directly related to the quizzes given in class. On the flashcards, the student can choose to show Kanji compounds with Furigana and/or English equivalents and set the "delay" time. The students can use these as review before quizzes. Flashcards could also be utilized in class. In addition, JOSHU includes the basic vocabulary lists (e.g., animals, colors, emotions). The lists contain the words in Kanji, Hiragana, Romaji, English equivalents, and audio buttons (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Kanji Flashcards



Figure 2: Basic Vocabulary List (Animals)

漢字	かな	Roomaji	English	audio
動物	どうぶつ	doobutsu	animal	▶
鱷	わに	wani	alligator	▶
猫	ねこ	neko	cat	▶

Many Kana flashcards and charts with stroke orders are already available online. For JOSHU, the word-search game (see Figure 3) was developed using Micromedia Flash for practicing Hiragana and Katakana. Each of the games has different word banks for different language levels: words in (1) Kana, (2) Romaji, (3) English, (4) English with audio in Japanese, and (5) audio only. For the intermediate students, words are defined in Japanese so that this game can be used as reading and/or listening materials. A hard copy of each game is also available for those students who prefer working on paper. As a course project for the third-year reading class, each student creates a word search (topic of his/her choice) with definitions written in Japanese on paper. After the completion of the project, they are converted to Flash format with different word banks.

Figure 3: Word-Search (English and Audio)



Online review quizzes are useful to meet the varying needs of students (Itoh and Hannon, 2002) and for students to use as a tool to self-test their understanding of materials before quizzes (Kondo and Hanai, 2006). JOSHU online exercises are formatted as multiple choice, pull-down menus, and fill in the blank (see Figure 4). After the answers are checked, the students can retry answering the questions they missed. In addition to Kanji and vocabulary exercises (some of them with audio), the students can practice conjugation and grammatical structures listed in the grammar reference section. They can also do particle and grammar review exercises prepared for each of their tests. Since these exercises are not intended as a testing tool, the students can view the “source” for the correct answers. They are encouraged to contact their instructors when they have questions. “Submit” buttons have been added to the Kanji and chapter review exercises so that these exercises can be used for homework. Preliminary results of a survey indicate: 46% of the second-year students (total of 50, one missing) view Kanji reading exercises as “useful” and 32% of the students as “very useful”; 52.2% of the second- and third-year students (total

of 67, three missing) view particle exercises as “useful” and 15% of the students as “very useful”; 54% of the second- and third-year students (total of 70) view grammar exercises as “useful” and 18% of the students as “very useful.” JOSHU also comes with the flashcards and quiz creators that allow the users to make their own exercises and flashcards.

Figure 4: Examples of exercises

smells like lemon
sounds like monkey
speaks like an alien
walks like a cat

Exemplification - そう、みたい
Describing Attributes with ~は~が...
Describe the picture above

1.) この人の目はチューリップ

2.) この人の耳はやきゅうのボール

3.) この人のかみのけは空

4.) この人はうでが4本

Type the reading of the Kanji compounds in Hiragana.

1. 物価	<input type="text" value="ぶっか"/>	price of goods	✓
2. 呼び止める	<input type="text" value="よ"/>	to flag down	✗
3. 慣れる	<input type="text" value="なれる"/>	to grow accustomed to	✓
4. 週間	<input type="text" value=""/>	custom; habit	?
5. 乗る	<input type="text" value="のる"/>	to ride	✓
6. 感じる	<input type="text" value="かんじる"/>	to feel	✓

On the grammar reference page, grammatical structures introduced in first-, second-, and third-year courses are cross-referenced in English, Japanese, and textbooks. Therefore, it can be used for review and as reference when writing essays. In addition to explanations of grammar structures and example sentences, pictures and simple animation are added where appropriate (see Figure 5). Video clips (skits/anime) are also added to explain how and when to use particular grammatical structures. These video clips are created by students in the second- and third-year classes. For this project, the students are writers, editors, performers, and media technicians, and they value the production of grammar videos as a review opportunity and as an enjoyable experience of creating supplementary teaching materials for fellow students (Aida and Suito, 2006).

Figure 5: Reference Page with Pictures and Animation

Transitive verbs		Intransitive verbs	
	私はねごをバスケットに入れます。		ねごがバスケットに入る。

Figure 6: Conjugation Table

Conjugation	Verb Type	Trans
のまない	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> plain negative	to not
のまなければ	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ba conditional negative	If (I) don't
	<input type="checkbox"/> passive	to be
	<input type="checkbox"/> causative	to make/let (someone)
のませられる	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> causative passive	to be made to
のみます	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> polite	to
	<input type="checkbox"/> polite negative	to not

Because the students very often have problems with conjugations, counters, and particles, the grammar reference section also includes conjugation, counter, and particle

tables (see Figure 6). These tables are interactive. For example, in the verb conjugation table, by clicking buttons, the user can either see the different forms of the verb all together or one by one. Therefore, the table can also be used as conjugation flashcards.

In the culture section, the students can view video clips, slide shows, and short movies created by fellow students who have visited Japan. As a course project, the third-year students explain the Japanese culture and a custom (of their choice) in Japanese aided by drawings and photos. Their projects, originally in PowerPoint format, are converted to slide shows with Flash. Preliminary results of a survey of the third-year students indicate that they enjoyed learning something new on a topic they are interested in and writing about it. These slide shows can be used as supplemental reading material.

Figure 7: Culture and Customs Page



CONCLUSION

With easy-to-follow, interactive, and fun learning tools, JOSHU is accessible to all students who are searching for review material and those students who want to learn more about Japanese culture. Ever since JOSHU was introduced to our students, there has been a steady stream of students who have become interested in volunteering their time for improving the site and developing their own Japanese learning tools. By encourage our students to contribute to JOSHU, they not only learn the language by developing their own exercises/games but also help other students in the process. With an IT grant, it became possible also to provide the rare opportunity for some of the students to get work experience with the Japanese language on-campus.

Online materials can be updated very easily, and there is great opportunity for instructors and students to expand the utility further to meet the ever-evolving needs of our students.

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