

DEVELOPING E-LEARNING SYSTEM OF JAPANESE LANGUAGE FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS IN JAPAN

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Abstract: In this paper, we describe the e-learning system for Japanese language we are developing. Japanese language education for foreign student is the one of the fields that is appropriate for e-learning. However, there are neither sufficient contents nor systems that are successful in sustaining motivation of users. Our project team proposes a content set with various devices to maintain learners' motivation. Such devices produce not a passive study style but an active, autonomous study style using web-based learning. It will provide conversation practice by using avatars, courses with stories and simulating games, and a web-based learners' dictionary. It will also provide a platform for interactions among learners and between learners and Japanese native speaking volunteers through a self-organized SNS and/or web phones. The whole of the content and system will be accessible by all of the higher education institutions in Japan.

Keywords: Japanese language learning, e-learning, SNS, avatar, simulation game

Introduction

"Project on welcoming 100,000 students from overseas" was announced in 1983. The current plan "Project on welcoming 300,000 students from overseas" (MEXT 2008) is stems from above, and in progress. Because of these policies, the need for Japanese language education was dramatically increased since the early 2000s. In some courses, students are able to obtain a course in English. However, all students required to attend Japanese class in the end. It is essential to have enough Japanese skill to ensure quality of studying life in Japan. However, in reality, all students do not have equal opportunity to study enough Japanese.

1. The purpose of this project

In University of Tsukuba, foreign students have increased (Fig.1).

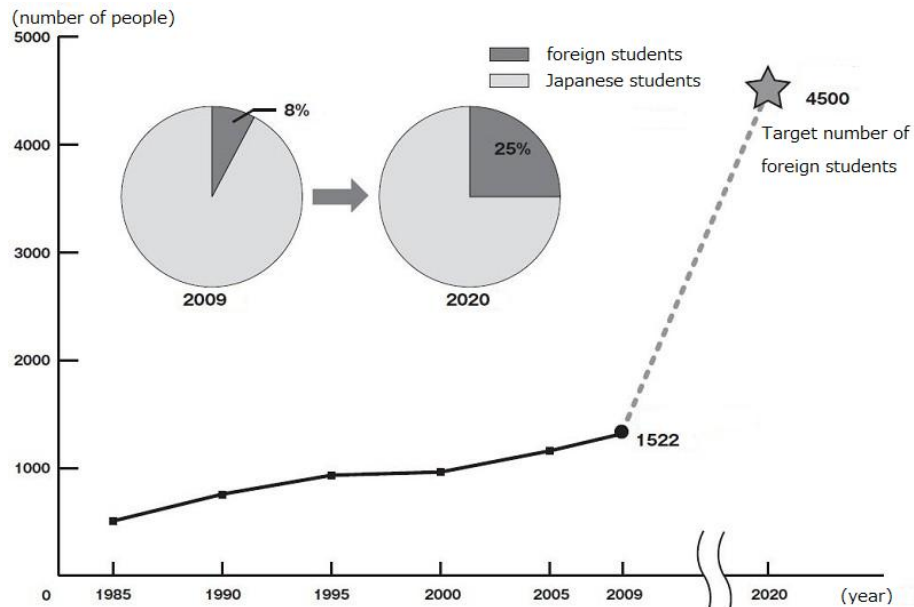


Fig 1. Changes in the number of foreign students

Number of all foreign students, from 2002 to 2006 was about 1,200. But the number from 2008 to 2010 increased from 1,337 to 1,944. In International Student Center, about 100 students each semester hopes to take class of Japanese lesson. However, they have to take the major classes of their own major and cannot take time for Japanese lessons. In order to participate in their experiments, there are many students who have to absent from their Japanese lessons. Many Japanese lessons require having previous lesson to understand. That is the reason why many students are tend to drop out and wish to have more opportunity to transfer lessons. In the field study of foreign student in university of Tsukuba (2010), foreign graduate students who major in science said that, in the experiment, they cause many troubles because their lack of understanding of Japanese language and the situation. They also felt alienation because they cannot communicate smoothly with other Japanese students. Even though some students are not required to attend courses in Japanese, they are in need of Japanese in their life in Japan. This is the reason why we thought the needs for Japanese E-learning.

2. Feature of the e-learning system for Japanese language

2.1 Including systems as self-study type

We are developing of user communities of learning system, simulating game system, the task events system, the agent system as a learning support teacher. These systems will support to motivate student to keep learning, and we aims to reduce the number of students who are drop out from self-study learning due to the feeling of loneliness. For example, we are proposing virtual classroom with other students using avatars, so student will have opportunity to use their own skill. We also use voice activation to give them opportunity to pronounce in Japanese. The avatar of agent in E-learning system will navigate throughout the lessons. This E-learning system will have feature like RPG to support students to exercise their skill following their lesson. There is also a chance to join SNS from this E-learning system to expand their chance to meet other people and opportunity to use their Japanese.

2.2 Contents of Japanese Lessons

Each Japanese lesson will have the flow chart such as bellow (Fig.2).

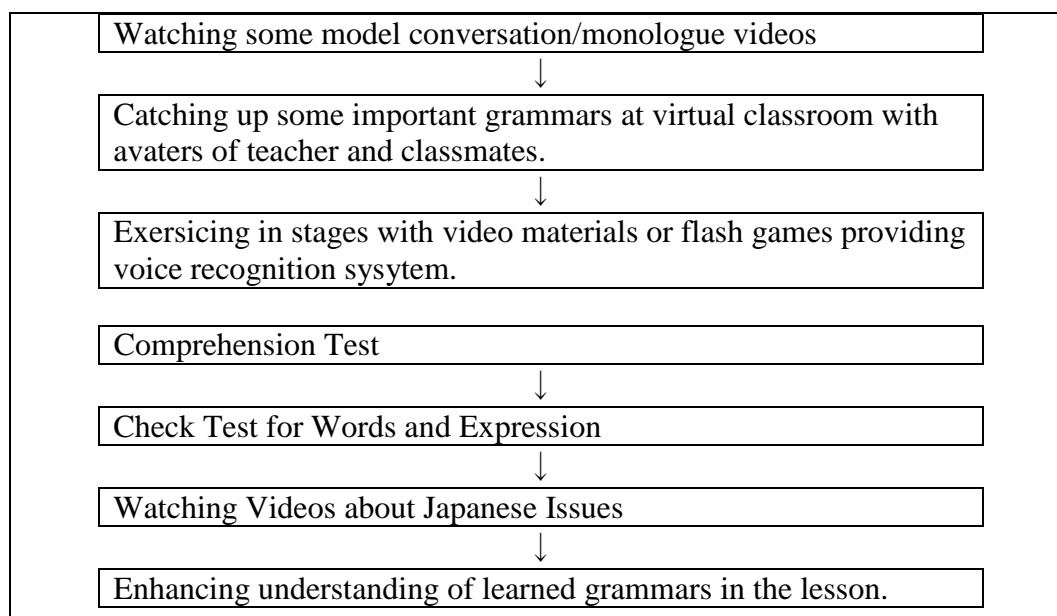


Fig 2. Flow chart of Japanese lesson.

In this Japanese E-learning system, each lesson will have systematic approach in learning grammar from beginner level through intermediate level. Our fundamental concepts of Japanese learning course are bellow.

- Learning grammar systematically & communicative approach: Using learned grammar only at the level to simulate communication.
- Focus on grammar form
- Authenticity: Communication skill like native Japanese speaker, including filler and gesture.
- Virtual System
- Awareness Raising: Simulating real classroom scene to help learning Japanese.
- Academic Japanese: Japanese for student such as university.

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