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ABSTRACT
                An innovative curriculum at New York University (NYU)
for teaching business Japanese is described. Theoretical foundations
for the approach used are reviewed, including research on language
simplification and comprehensible input for classroom learning, the
concept of importing the real world into classroom interaction, the
role of specific tasks in facilitating language learning, and the
effectiveness of paired or group work. Application of these
principles in the NYU business Japanese course through the teaching
method of simulation is then outlined. The classroom simulates a
Japanese company office, in which several "companies" of the
students' choice, staffed by students and two or more instructors,
operate. Class activities are designed to provide opportunities for
realistic communicative use of Japanese. Japanese corporate culture
and Japanese etiquette are introduced through the curriculum.
Language use is designed to simulate actual business language style.
Authentic written materials are used, and written language is
introduced in Chinese characters, as in a real office. Student
response to the course design has been positive. The weakest
curriculum area has been writing, and this will be addressed through
out-of-class assignments, with classroom time devoted to ineraction.
The class schedule is appended. Contains 32 references. (MSE)

# JAPANESE FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES: A SIMULATION APPROACH

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"Japanese for Business Purposes: A Simulation Approach"
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## Abstract

This paper describes an innovative curriculum, developed at New York University, for teaching Japanese for business purposes, using a simulation approach. Currently the course is underway in its 4th session and we feel very positively about its effectiveness. The rationale for its effectiveness supported by some empirical data is provided as well as a sample lesson plan and a list of reference.

## Introduction

Although the explosive world-wide enthusiasm of the 80's seems to have tapered off somewhat, Japanese continues to be an important language to study especially in the United State because the two nations must work closely together as world leaders in the global economy of today. In 1991 the "White Paper," so to speak, of the Japanese programs in the United States, an in-depth comprehensive survey of Japanese language teaching both inside and outside of the formal educational system, from kindergarten through graduate school, was published by the National Foreign Language Center (Jorden & Lambert, 1991). In response to their conclusion that "overall Japanese curriculum needs a new look, developed with professionalism, imagination, and willing- ness to try something thus far untried," we at New York University have developed an innovative curriculum using a simulation approach.

Here in the United States both students and teachers seem to have long accepted a myth that Japanese is "impossible," "truly foreign," and is "the most difficult language for Americans to learn," as the result of which Japanese has

been taught in a variety of simplified versions (Unger et al., 1993). In the process of the simplification, however, Japanese has often been distorted.

Speaking, for example, is limited to a formal speech style called desu/masu style only, which is more or less a neutral and impersonal speech style that is used when formally addressing people of equal status, keeping some distance between the two speakers at the same time. When addressing people of higher status or strangers, the Japanese culture requires yet another polite speech style to be used, either honoring others or humbling yourself. Among equals, however, once you get to know people, another speech style called Informal Style is preferred with a male and a female variation in order not to alienate yourself from the rest of the In-Group. The desu/masu style is, therefore, very limited in its usage, and yet, to simplify what seems to be the complex Japanese core culture the desu/masu style is taught as if it were the one and only speech. To stretch the desu/masu style to all people, regardless of the relative social status differences, results in an unreal Japanese that does not exist in Japanese life.

The pragmatics or the cultural appropriateness of utterances has also been ignored. Too often Japanese is taught so that the students will be able to say in Japanese what they normally say in English. The Japanese communication norm finds this so-called translated-from-English version of Japanese very strange and often unacceptable.

The complex writing system is also simplified, either using the English alphabet, which is known as Romanized Japanese, or using only kana syllabaries ignoring kanji, the Chinese characters. Neither of these written forms of Japanese is found anywhere except in Japanese textbooks for foreigners.

These simplifications are to be un-learned and re-adjusted usually at a later stage of study, but for a vast majority of our students, chances are that they will NEVER get to even see, hear, speak, or write authentic Japanese! This is a serious problem that we the teachers of Japanese must grapple with and make a fundamental change in our teaching so that what we teach becomes useful and meaningful. We must teach authentic Japanese, not pseudo-Japanese that does not even exist in Japanese life.

## Theoretical Framework for Simulation Approach

The simplified input provided by the teacher is often referred to as "Teacher Talk" or "Foreigner Talk." It is a common practice among all language teachers. It is characterized by modification in lexicon, syntax, phonology, and accompanying nonverbal behavior such as a slow rate of delivery, loudness, clear articulation, pauses, emphatic stress, exaggerated pronunciation etc. Many teachers have an intuitive ability to modify/ simplify their speech, aiming perhaps at some hypothetical learner. Expert teachers can adjust their language in accordance with the feedback supplied by learners. According to Krashen, the input has no value for learners' acquisition unless it is comprehensible to them so this modification is necessary. Moreover, this modification, according to Krashen, must be aimed at the "i" + 1 level, i.e. slightly above the learners' present proficiency level.

Swain adds to Krashen's Input Hypothesis that comprehensible output, or learners' correct production, is also necessary to internalize the comprehensible input. Swain argues that producing output that is precise, coherent, and appropriate encourages learners to develop the necessary grammatical resources, provides the learner with opportunities to test hypotheses, and may force the learner to move from the kind of semantic processing that is possible

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in reception to the syntactic processing required in production. This comprehensible output should be "pushed", a concept that is paralleled to that of the "i" + 1 of comprehensible input (Swain, 1985).

Despite the shortcomings pointed out by McLaughlin (1987) and many others, Krashen's theory together with Swain's addition seems to be empirically grounded. The studies conducted by Lightbown confirm that a great deal of SLA is possible through comprehensible input and comprehensible output. (Lightbown, 1992).

I have cited Krashen and Swain to legitimize the simplification of Japanese. However, I would like to point out that the simplification must be adjusted constantly at the "i" + 1 level. "Teacher Talk", for example, must be progressive. The simplified input must also be quality input i.e. authentic. Simplified Japanese that is not authentic can not be considered as a comprehensible input.

In his extensive analysis of native speaker/non-native speaker (NS/NNS) conversations, Long distinguishes modified input and modified interaction when native speakers modify their speech when addressing non-native speakers. Long argues that simplified input is necessary but not sufficient for SLA. It is the frequency of various interactional modifications (called "conversational management devices") that native speakers employ that benefit the learner's SLA. (Long, 1981).

What is crucial for second language acquisition, according to Long is a genuine interaction. Language does not exist in a vacuum. Language is acquired as a process of socialization in a particular culture. The premise of teaching Japanese as a foreign language, therefore, is to provide opportunities for learners to experience socializing in Japanese. Within a limited space of a classroom and constrained by a limited time of a semester or two, teachers

must provide authentic interaction as much as possible. Japanese must be presented always in a proper context so that genuine interaction can take place.

In second (foreign) language learning the basic assumption has been that one first learns necessary grammar, gradually builds up a repertoire of structures and vocabulary, and then, somehow, learns how to use them in a conversation. Hatch, however, claims that it is exactly the other way around. One learns how to interact verbally, and it is out of this interaction that syntactic structures are developed. Second language acquisition is guided by interaction with others (e.g. teachers, fellow students etc.) in an associated set of experiences (Hatch, 1978).

Research has also shown that language input derived from personalized or learner-initiated language interaction has more impact on the learners' hypotheses testing for his/her Interlanguage development (McLaughlin, 1987). The more interaction learner had, the more opportunities hey had for their hypotheses testing, which consequently enables their output, even though it still has errors, to be closer to the target language (Seliger, 1983).

We all know that acquisition of L1 and L2 takes place without formal classroom instruction. We also know that classroom instruction can facilitate the acquisition process and accelerate the speed and the level of proficiency achieved in a given time. In order to maximize the facilitation, it is only logical to think that we must bring some of the real world into the classroom to practice in. The real world, in this instance, means natural conversation.

Classroom interaction is probably best viewed as a continuum, reflecting at one pole, instructional discourse, and at the other, natural discourse. Naturally <u>both</u> pedagogic discourse <u>and</u> natural discourse are necessary for successful language acquisition. To think that only natural

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discourse is acquisition-rich and pedagogic discourse including simplification or the use of L1 is acquisition-poor is.wrong (Ellis, 1992).

The studies of traditional language classrooms report, however, that the two are not balanced; the former dominates over the latter. Often hardly any genuine interaction or natural discourse takes place (Pica & Long, 1986). The transcribed text of a typical lockstep classroom interaction between a teacher and a student often shows isolated one-sentence answers (or even shorter utterances) to various display questions such as "which is faster, a train or an airplane?", allowing very little chance for students to negotiate for meaning that is necessary if learners are to obtain comprehensible input (Long, 1975). Many Japanese classrooms are no exception.

In order to increase the quantity of interaction, the best way is to divide the class into small groups or pairs and let the students talk amongst themselves simultaneously. This action, however, raises the following questions. What will happen when learners talk to each other? What will be the quality of such conversation? Do they learn mistakes from each other? What will they talk about? What kind of activities solicit what kind of conversation? Should we set up groups or pairs according to the same level of language ability? What will happen to the class management? What will the teacher do while the learners talk? Who will correct errors? And when?

First let us consider the quality of these interactions. We can evaluate learner/learner interaction or the input that learners provide in terms of Long's hypothesis that "participation in conversation with native speakers, made possible through the modification of interaction, is the necessary and sufficient condition for second language acquisition." The native speaker's interactional modifications help prevent and repair break-downs in communication and to sustain conversation. Knowing whether and to what

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extent learner input includes these crucial features can tell us how relevant and useful learner input is for language acquisition.

An interesting study conducted by Pica confirms Long's hypothesis that modified interaction is more necessary than modified input for SLA. Here she defines modified interaction as "negotiation," an activity that occurs when a listener signals to a speaker that the speaker's message is not clear (Pica, 1992).

The value of NNS/NNS Interlanguage was evidenced by Porter's study. Porter concluded that although learners cannot provide each other with the accurate grammatical and sociolinguistic input that native speakers can, learners can offer each other genuine communicative practice including the negotiation for meaning that is believed to aid SLA. The quality of the talk they produce in terms of the negotiation process is high with more variety and with a wider range of speech acts than NS/NNS conversation. We must, then, establish the optimum balance of learner input and teacher-controlled input so that our students can get both sufficient practice in genuine communication and sufficient exposure to accurate language models (Porter, 1986).

Confirmation of Porter's findings has been provided in the subsequent studies using different tasks (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Pica & Doughty, 1985; Rulon & McCreary, 1986 and Duff, 1986). Different tasks promoted different kinds of interaction. It seems like two-way tasks conducted in heterogeneous pairs are most effective in terms of the quality and quantity of the learners' comprehensible output. The shared background between the pairing learners influences the kind of interaction they have more than the kind of task itself. Heterogeneous groups produce more interaction.

Carefully structured group work is associated with Cooperative Learning (CL).. Group work fosters talking to learn. Pairs or small groups

provide non threatening situations so that each student talks readily. Talk does not take place in a vacuum so teachers must provide real problems to solve and real situations to explore.

Let us now consider some practical issues of how to implement these tasks that can be so effective if done in pairs in our actual Japanese class- rooms. The communicative task is defined as "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form" (Nunan, 1989). Tasks can be categorized according to their goals, input data, activities, settings and roles. Many innovative ideas for different tasks such as role plays, problem solving, and simulation are available in the literature. (Di Pietro, 1987; Rivers, 1987; Niimura, 1990; Kessler, 1992).

## Application of the Simulation to NYU Japanese Course

The Japanese language is, like any other language, a reflection of the Japanese culture, which tends to define a person in relation to other people, not as an individual, independent of others. Every utterance is determined by the relative social status of the speakers involved i.e. either Informal or Formal Speech. Informal Speech has two registers: Male and Female. Formal Speech as also two registers: Formal Plain and Formal Polite. The Formal Polite has two registers: Honoring Others and Humbling Ourselves.

The conventional method of teaching Japanese has either avoided or lacked effectiveness in presenting these essentially important aspects of the Japanese language, especially at the elementary level. The present study is very unique and innovative in employing two instructors (an Instructor and a Teaching Assistant) in a simulation of a Japanese company setting, which

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enables us, as is demonstrated in the following lesson plan, to expand the dimension of Japanese language teaching, giving the language its proper socio-linguistic context.

Unlike traditional language classrooms, our classroom becomes a Japanese company office. On the first day we create several "companies" of the students' choice. (Each company is composed of 4 or 5 students.) Every member of the class assumes a position of either Section Chief, Manager or (title-less) Employees. The instructor becomes Department Head. Preferably two TAs (a male and a female) are employed to become (title-less) Employees. This setting allows us to introduce in a most natural and context-rich environment the complex socio-linguistic features of Japanese, i.e. different speech styles that must be adjusted constantly, depending on the relative social status of the speakers involved: Section Chief vs. Staff Member, Male vs. Female, In-Group vs. Out-Group etc.

Since the goal of this course is to prepare students to be able to function well in a Japanese company, we have prepared scenes from various office activities that a new American employee might encounter on a typical Japanese business day. These topics or the scenes are arranged in sequence, from a morning meeting to an after-work socializing etc. (Please see List of Topics in the Appendix.) so that by the end of the semester students would be exposed to an entire day, working at a Japanese office. Activities are designed to provide learners with opportunities to use their Japanese for communicative purposes. Only the most meaningful and authentic activities are selected. Research shows that the more realistic the tasks are, the more motivated to communicate the students become. The Japanese corporate culture is introduced throughout the course. A supplementary reading list from Japanese Business Etiquette is also provided.

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Receptive skills are developed first (listening and reading) before productive skills (speaking and writing), although speaking is never stifled at any time. Listening is particularly important for a non-native speaker because in Japanese business culture the "low status" person is relegated to a more silent position. The grammar is taught inductively. A systematic sequencing of functional as well as structural aspects of Japanese is considered as much as possible. The lessons are presented in a spiraling manner so that students are always reinforced by the previously learned materials.

We begin by training students to listen to two instructors, who try to speak as normally and naturally as possible, maintaining proper speech styles, the kind of conversation that you would normally be hearing at a Japanese company. The students are encouraged to help each other in conjecturing the gist of the conversation, using both verbal and non-verbal clues as well as contextual support. They are to "test" their understanding when they speak Japanese, asking for clarification, negotiating meaning, etc. They are expected to say what they want to say, which is strictly spontaneous. This differs essentially, for example, from memorizing a model dialog and acting it out. The student-generated input is valued and encouraged. Learners work in pairs or groups employing available language resources in problem-solving tasks.

Authentic materials such as advertisements, company memos and invitations are used to develop reading skills. From the very beginning, company names, superior's names, titles, names of rooms etc. are all introduced in Kanji (the Chinese characters), exactly the way they are written in the actual office building. Writing skills are also developed in a

most natural and authentic setting such as writing your name, filling out forms, writing memos for faxes, etc.

Our class meets for 105 minutes, twice a week. The format of our lesson is as follows:   Daily Activities (taking attendance etc.)................10 mts.

Briefing Period (review of the previous lessons,
          homework correction, quiz etc.
          pre-view of today's lesson)..........15 mts.

Simulation (Pair work practice
          Today's topic.).......................................65 mts.

Debriefing Period (Conclusion
          Comments, error correction
          homework assignment) ...........15 mts

The students are guided to develop effective language learning strategies of their own to become autonomous learners eventually. Homework, therefore, is very important, reflecting 40% of the course grade.

## Some Empirical Data

Being a "traditional" teacher myself, i.e. a firm believer of grammatical competence, I had some doubts about what our simulation approach can achieve. I am pleasantly surprised and very happy to report that our simulation seems to be proving to be very effective for elementary level students as well as intermediate and advanced students. With more than one instructor being physically present in the classroom, we can give our students many opportunities to listen to authentic Japanese with proper adjustment for the relative social status differences. Our students had many opportunities to communicate somehow, using their limited knowledge of Japanese spontaneously in various situations. They wanted to communicate using both verbal and non-verbal tools. They had to communicate because once the simulation period began there was no teacher around, only the "real"

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company, until the simulation was over followed by the debriefing period. These opportunities "pushed" the students' output more, helping them to improve their Interlanguage at a seemingly quicker rate than the conventional language classroom setting. Students seemed to enjoy speaking Japanese. They were not afraid. There was no model dialog to follow so they were completely on their own to manage/survive the situation somehow.

The students seemed to accept the different speech style registers as they are and there was no need to simplify it, by sticking to the one and only Desu/masu speech style. The response to the writing of the kanji was the same. We did not particularly expect our students to produce them, only to recognize them, increasing the exposure as much as possible at the same time. Again they seemed to accept the writing system as it is (What else can they do?!) They were not at all intimidated by the presence of kanji.

The students seemed to use much more language learning strategies and more often than the students in a traditional classroom because our simulation approach is student-centered. They were much more involved in their leering, trying to guess intelligently, making up their own phrases etc.

The overall comments from the students were very favorable. They all expressed how much they enjoyed speaking. They especially enjoyed viewing themselves on the video. The cooperative learning created a very supportive, warm atmosphere. We had many good laughs. "It was fun. I liked it." was a unanimous final comment.

The weakest area would be writing because writing in our curriculum was limited to filling out the various forms, writing a memo for telephone messages and the fax, writing a floor chart, and writing a party notice and an advertisement. We can overcome this weakness by assigning more reading and writing for homework, especially for more advanced students, using the

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Japanese newspapers, magazines etc. The classroom time, however, should be used for actual interaction using the homework.

## Conclusion

Teaching a simplified version of Japanese is a serious problem if the simplification is not adjusted constantly and it is not accompanied by genuine interaction. The writer believes that the teachers can solve the problem by changing the traditional, one-direction, lockstep classroom to a place where more personalized, genuine communication takes place. A simulation approach is one good example where students can use the language in a coherent and cohesive context, promoting more genuine interaction.

Teachers are encouraged to promote more Learner/Learner interaction in their classrooms. Such interaction is crucial because 1) It allows learners to test out their hypotheses, 2) It gives more comprehensible input through peer interaction and it "pushes" learners' comprehensible output, which is necessary for SAL, 3) It provides "interactional devices" necessary for SAL, 4) It is vital in order to internalize special linguistic features of Japanese because they are embedded in the interaction of people, 5) It provides a supportive, cooperative, and non threatening learning environment, and 6) It generates more student-initiated input, which makes learning of Japanese more student-directed. Once learners become autonomous and empowered, they can continue learning Japanese on their own because language learning is a life long endeavor.

## Appendix A

### JAPANESE FOR BUSINESS PURPOSE

Required Texts: <u>Nihongode Bijinesu Kaiwa</u> byJapanese Language Institute
Bonjinsha. 1989.

Recommended Texts:
> <u>Nihongode Bujinesu Kaiwa (English Translation & Grammatical Explanations)</u> Bonjinsha. 1989.

> <u>Kana Can Be Easy</u> by Kunihiko Ogawa. The Japan Times, 1990.

> <u>Japanese Business Etiquette</u> by Diana Rowland

### Class Schedule:

| Lesson | Quiz | Date | | | Topic |
|--------|------|------|----|---|-------|
| #1 | | Jan. | 23 | M | General Introduction |
| #2 | | | 25 | W | Introducing Oneself & Setting Up a Company |
| #3 | | | 30 | M | Getting Familiar with the Office |
| #4 | Q1 | Feb. | 1 | W | Morning Meeting |
| #5 | | | 6 | M | Receiving a Phone Call |
| #6 | | | 8 | W | Making a Phone Call |
| #7 | Q2 | | 13 | M | Morning Coffee Break |
| #8 | | | 15 | W | Receiving Visits from Other Companies |
| | | | 20 | M | (Holiday --- No Class) |
| #9 | | | 22 | W | Visiting Other Companies |
| #10 | Q3 | | 27 | M | Lunch Time |
| #11 | | March | 1 | W | Making a Quick Personal Call |
| #12 | Q4 | | 6 | M | Getting Office Supplies |
| #13 | | | 8 | W | <u>Midterm Exam</u> |
| | | | 13 & 15 | | (Spring Recess --- No Classes) |
| #14 | | | 20 | M | Receiving Fax |
| #15 | | | 22 | W | Sending Fax |
| #16 | | | 27 | M | Receiving Letters |
| #17 | | | 29 | W | Taking Phone Messages |
| #18 | | April | 3 | M | Filing & Document Circulation |
| #19 | Q5 | | 5 | W | Making an Appointment for Business Trip |
| #20 | | | 10 | M | Planning a Company Trip |
| #21 | | | 12 | W | Inviting Co-Workers After Work |
| #22 | Q6 | | 17 | M | A Boss Invites Staff Members to a Bar |
| #23 | | | 19 | W | At a Karaoke Bar |
| #24 | | | 24 | M | Personal Department Decision Making |
| #25 | Q7 | | 26 | W | Review |
| #26 | | May | 1 | M | Review |
| #27 | | | 3 | W | Preparing a Short Speech |
| #28 | | | 8 | M | <u>Final Exam</u> |
| #29 | | | 10 | W | Farewell Party & Speech |

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