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## A VIEW ON CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR JAPANESE LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

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### Abstract

According to a model curriculum presented by the Research Committee Meeting on JFL Teachers Training, the Agency for Cultural Affairs in 2000, JFL teachers training course consists of subjects mainly to cultivate international view points as well as the Japanese language teaching pedagogy. Its target is not to train Japanese students to acquire knowledge of Japanese language as a national language but to train them to acquire knowledge of JFL to be able to teach Japanese language to foreign learners.

Japanese language department and international students' education center for JFL are separate. Among international students, there are many who aim at becoming teachers of JFL. They have to study their majoring subjects together with Japanese students from freshman if they want to enter the Japanese language department.

The requirement is for them to have passed Japanese language proficiency test N1-level before they can get accepted into Japanese language department.

Japanese language departments in overseas universities on the other hand have dual functions; 1) for students to become a Japanese linguist and 2) to become a Japan generalist. For this reason, lots of curriculum design challenges need to be considered.

In this paper, two kinds of curriculum models within Japan will be presented for reference. Challenges to define more applicable curriculum at overseas universities will also be examined.

**Keywords :** Japanese as-a-Foreign-Language (JFL), Japanese Language Teachers' Training Course Curriculum, International Perspective, Social-Cultural-Regional studies

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Training teachers for Japanese-as-a-Foreign-Language (JFL) has extensively risen in Japan since 1980s. In 2000, the Research Committee Meeting on JFL Teachers Training, the Agency for Cultural Affairs which is the extension office of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (the former Ministry of Education) presented an updated model curriculum of training teachers for JFL with a view from international perspective ("2000 Curriculum Framework").

Japanese universities, on the other hand, have their own Japanese language education centers for international students or Japanese language schools which are run based on their own curriculum. With such system, foreign learners are to be able to learn Japanese languages exclusively in the most applicative, theoretical and systematic way of learning. Meanwhile, the Japanese Language departments at overseas universities have dual functions; 1) teaching students the required Japanese language starting from zero level up to the advanced level, to become proficient in Japanese language and 2) training students to become Japanese language teachers as generalists on Japan related matters. In its implementation, however, there seems to be a lot of problems for the actualization of both functions at the same time.

In this paper, the whereabouts of the problems in overseas Japanese department curriculum will be observed and a more effective curriculum design will be examined.

## 2. CHANGE OF CONCEPT ON JAPANESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION AS A RESULT OF INCREASING NUMBER OF NEW FOREIGNERS TO JAPAN

Before 1980s, there were not many Japanese language education centers for JFL which were attached to limited number of universities<sup>1</sup> and some other official agencies to accept foreign trainees<sup>2</sup>. Training Japanese language teachers then was meant, in general, to be providing training for teachers of a national language of Japan, “Kokugo<sup>3</sup>”.

In 1980s, with the increase of foreigners<sup>4</sup> coming to Japan (“new comers”), concept of Japanese Language teaching as JFL was deeply penetrated into the Japanese language teaching. In 1985, the Committee of Ministry of Education presented the standard curriculum for training JFL teachers. According to the curriculum, the weight was put on the knowledge of Japanese linguistics and teaching pedagogy. The Japanese language teaching competency test then followed, starting in 1988.

In 1990, the new immigration law<sup>5</sup> was legislated and foreigners with Japanese descent became free to visit Japan to stay and to seek for job opportunities. For this reason, the flow of foreigners with Japanese descent, especially from Brazil, became explosive. As such, it required a large number of teachers of JFL including voluntary teachers<sup>6</sup>. The society demanded JFL teachers to acquire many more new competencies such as competencies in Portuguese, understanding of foreign resident matters in Japan, cross- cultural interaction and many other aspects previously not so much required.

To be able to teach Japanese language as JFL requires teachers to have the knowledge of international relations issues in addition to the linguistic background. This requirement necessitates new curriculum to be legislated. In 2000, the Research Committee Meeting on JFL Teachers Training under the Agency for Cultural Affairs of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (formerly the Ministry of Education) presented the most updated model curriculum of training JFL teachers emphasizing the need for in-depth international understanding. (“2000 Curriculum Framework”)

The “2000 Curriculum Framework” consists mainly of subjects cultivating on international understanding as well as Japanese language linguistics and teaching pedagogy. Its target is not to train students to perceive Japanese language as a mother tongue but to train students to perceive Japanese language as a foreign language. An example of the “2000 Curriculum Framework” is as shown in appendix 1. The theory of “2000 Curriculum Framework” was basically adopted by Mejiro University in 2004 for its Curriculum Design of Japanese Language Department (“Mejiro Curriculum”), by the Committee of Faculty of Foreign Languages of Mejiro University in which I was representing Japanese Language Department as a Committee member.

“2000 Curriculum Framework” consists of three major divisions; 1) “Language”, 2) “Society-Culture” and 3) “Education”. The three divisions are subdivided into five sections. That is; 1) Language, 2) Language and Education, 3) Language and Society, 4) Language and Psychology, and 5) Society, Culture and Region. Some subjects within the section of Society-Culture-Region are featuring “2000 Curriculum Framework” and it shows that Japanese language education aims to cultivate Japanese teachers to have international understanding. Other subjects in the section of Society-Culture-Region, such as subjects related to Japanese Literature and Calligraphy, are

<sup>1</sup> Firstly, around 1960s, National Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and National Osaka University of Foreign Studies accepted international students for teaching JFL. Those students are Japanese government scholarship students who learned Japanese language for half a year. After the completion of Japanese language study, they moved to various postgraduate schools depending on their specialties. Half-a -year Japanese course at Osaka University of Foreign Studies was an intensive learning of Japanese course with introductory lectures of classical cultures and cultural study tour to visit old Japan such as Nara and Kyoto.

<sup>2</sup> Official institutions such as Japan International Cooperative Agency and Association for Overseas Technical Scholarship, both supported by ODA (Official Development Aid) management, especially JICA as a huge international cooperation agency of Japan.

<sup>3</sup> Japanese as a national language

<sup>4</sup> 1980s in proportion to bubble economy of Japan, a large number of foreigners with illegal stay overflowed into Japan.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Justice (1990) Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act

<sup>6</sup> Recent Japanese society has a large number of voluntary JFL teachers who have been supporting Japanese language teaching for increasing foreign learners. A lot of voluntary teachers, however, have been teaching Japanese language without acquirement of knowledge or skill of language pedagogy.

compulsory subjects when students are taking “Kokugo” teaching course as a national language teacher.

With regard to acceptance of international students, Mejiro Japanese Language Departments accept them in its department to approximately 25% out of the total number of students. Among international students, there are many who aim to become teachers of JFL or to work at Japanese enterprises. They have to study their majoring subjects together with Japanese students from freshman. Therefore, they are required to hold N1 level in new Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT)<sup>1</sup> before they can get accepted into Japanese Language Department. In case they have not got N1 level proficiency, N2 level is compulsory. As Japanese Language Department does not have any special program to support international students to learn Japanese language itself, they are required to have fulfilled Japanese proficiency in advance.

### 3. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EDUCATION CENTER

#### 3-1. International students' education center for JFL

Where can international students learn Japanese language? Some universities have international students' education centers or institutions<sup>2</sup> for foreign learners to learn Japanese language intensively, which are extension systems of universities for preparatory Japanese language lessons. International students can learn Japanese language exclusively plus introductory lectures on Japanese society and culture, and Japanese related study tour.

Appendix 2 is the curriculum of Japanese Language Program for International Students at Center for Japanese Language Education, Mejiro University (“Mejiro Education Center”). Students learning at Mejiro Education Center are not obliged to enroll into faculties of Mejiro University. They are free to choose other universities after having completed their Japanese language course at Mejiro Education Center. Mejiro Education Center also provides preparatory classes for Examination for Japanese University (EJU) Admission for International Students. Mejiro Education Center also provides preparatory classes for taking JLPT and postgraduate school entrance program.

Some learners, however, learn Japanese language not at the university extension program but at other Japanese language school for one and half year or two years (approximately 1,000 hours ) to prepare for EJU. In any case, foreign students learn Japanese language as preparatory lessons before entering Japanese universities.

#### 3-2. Course for *Bahasa Indonesia untuk Penutur Asing* ( BIPA ) at University of Indonesia

In relevance to the above and for curriculum reference purposes, I would mention I have been attending at the program as a regular students at BIPA since January 2013.

BIPA, the Indonesian Language Teaching for Foreign Learners, is an extension program at University of Indonesia. It consists of three levels; BIPA 1 for novices, BIPA 2 for intermediate course and BIPA 3 for advanced course with total study hours of approximately 750. According to Indonesian Language Proficiency Test<sup>3</sup> level, the contents of BIPA 2 seem to correspond to level C, and BIPA 3 to level B. According to the Indonesian Language Proficiency Test level scale, Level B is semi-advanced level. Indonesian Language Proficiency Test has five levels ranging from level Special A up to level E. Level Special A is the highest and level E is the lowest. Accordingly and judging from the contents and total hours of study, BIPA 3 seems to correspond to a semi-advanced proficiency level.

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<sup>1</sup> According to new Japanese Language Proficiency Test ( JLPT) since 2010, there are five proficiency levels namely N1 Level up to N5 Level. N1 is a little higher level than the former JLPT Level One. Former JLPT had four levels; Level 1 up to Level 4. Level One requires approximately 10,000 words and 2,000 Kanji characters with approximately 900 hours of study. N2 is equivalent to former Level Two. Level Two requires approximately 6,000 words and 1,000 kanji characters with approximately 600 hours of study. N3 Level is between former Level Two and Level Three. Level Three requires approximately 1,500 words and 300 kanji characters with approximately 300 hours of study. N4 Level is equivalent to former Level Three. N5 Level is equivalent to former Level Four. Level Four requires approximately 800 words and 100 kanji characters with approximately 150 hours of study.

<sup>2</sup> The names of such centers or institutions are various depending on universities; some universities give a name as International Students Center, others give a name as International Students Bekka (Department) or International Education Center and so on.

<sup>3</sup> The test is hosted by “Himpunan Penyelenggara Ujian Bahasa Indonesia” and ties up with the Agency for the Development and Construction of the Language, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia.

The BIPA curriculum is theoretical and systematic allowing foreign learners to learn in a systematic learning fashion. BIPA adopts drama technique in discussion class. Students can learn fluency and communication skill through drama performance. BIPA syllabus is fully integrated in that all the nine subjects<sup>1</sup> such as reading, discussion, grammar and others are interlinked, all in full alignment with the subject theme. Therefore each lecturer understands fully the contents of all the subjects and seems to be able to take up any subject in different classes, when required, without having to bear heavy preparation load. The system seems to make it easier for the lecturer to prepare for even the next day's lesson. This point seems to be totally different from the syllabus system of Mejiro Education Center. The syllabus of each subject at the Mejiro Education Center is not interdependent. Each subject is prepared only by respective lecturers in charge. As other lecturers are not involved in writing the syllabus design, it is difficult for some lecturers to teach various kinds of subjects. For even once a week teaching, they will have to do a lot of preparation for teaching a different subject with different syllabus. Consequently I think integration of syllabus for all the subjects at JFL center is desirable.

Related to Indonesian Language Proficiency Test, BIPA curriculum does not correspond to Indonesian Language Proficiency Test. It would be desirable that BIPA curriculum be linked to the Indonesian Language Proficiency Test which ties up with the Agency for Development and Construction of Language, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia.

#### **4. JAPANESE LANGUAGE DEPARTMENTS IN OVERSEAS UNIVERSITIES**

##### **4-1. Dual functions of overseas Japanese Language Departments**

Japanese departments in overseas universities have two major functions: 1) to teach Japanese language for students to become proficient and 2) to prepare students to understand not only of the language itself but also of the Japanese culture related matters so they can work either as a JFL teacher or at Japanese enterprises and or government offices.

They should be proficient in Japanese language and at the same time have the mastery about Japan and the Japanese with a broader and more international perspective. To fulfill both goals, some innovative education programs need to be applied. Four-year course is too short for students to fully learn both aspects of Japanese linguistics and general aspects of Japanese society, culture, history, politics and current affairs.

##### **4-2. Japanese Language Diploma Course of National University of North Sumatera (USU)**

Back in 1980-1982, I had the opportunity to establish a half-day three-year intensive Japanese Language Diploma Course, the extension program to the Faculty of Literature and Arts of National University of North Sumatera (USU). The curriculum consisted of subjects focusing on four basic skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing, plus an introductory lecture on "Japanese Society and Culture" and "on-the-job learning enterprise tour" to provide students with hands-on experience and exposure to Japanese companies. Graduation thesis was obligatory although study time was too short. Its target was to train students to become proficient in Japanese language competency skill. As the result, two alumnae among the first graduates became lecturers of the alma mater USU and some others worked for Japanese enterprises or travel agencies handling many Japanese tourists. Some graduates became indeed proficient in Japanese language capability. The problem however lies in deficiency in cultural and other Japan related understanding such as history, humanity, politic, geography, literature and other subjects related to international relations between Japan and other nations. These subjects are similar to a group of subjects of "Society-Culture-Region" contained in "2000 Curriculum Framework" in Japan. The USU Diploma Course is half-day three-year language course with shortage of time to cover culture related subjects. Introductory lectures on culture can help increase students' understanding of Japan and become helpful in finding a theme for graduation thesis. To our delight, USU's Diploma Course has at the present moment been reestablished as S1 (Bachelor) Degree Program.

<sup>1</sup> BIPA 3 course consists of "Grammar", "Listening", "Writing", "Non-formal Indonesian Language", "Culture of Indonesia", "Discussion", "Vocabulary", "Reading" and "Presentation"

## 5. TOWARD MORE COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM

I mentioned in paragraph 3-1 that international students learn Japanese language as preparatory lessons for approximately 1,000 hours. As this basic learning of Japanese language supports latter study on Japan and Japanese culture, one solution to supplement shortage of study time is to lengthen the period in its curriculum so as to enable students to absorb more knowledge of Japan and the Japanese.

At some universities of foreign studies<sup>1</sup> in Japan, in general, students have to start majoring language learning from freshman in addition to general subjects learning; hence the number of compulsory credits of subjects is much more than other universities. If basic language learning can be completed within first two years, students can spend the rest of the two years for main subjects dealing with Japanese language pedagogy, “Language and Psychology” and “Society-Culture-Region”.

Another problem at overseas Japanese language departments is deficiency in the variety of subjects in “Society-Culture-Region”. To supplement this deficiency, many issues have to be resolved. Similarly “Mejiro Curriculum” in Japan also has this kind of problem. Although “Mejiro Curriculum” is full of updated subjects, it has a problem for lacking lecturers who can teach those updated subjects within the department. For several years from the opening year of the department, the Japanese Language Department had to invite many experts and specialists for those subjects from outside organizations. The number of invited experts and specialists to teach at the Japanese Language Department was more than those teaching at other departments as some subjects within “Society-Culture-Region” are too interdisciplinary to be covered by Japanese language experts. Invitation of the experts and specialists was obligatory. Consequently however, it results in high cost for the university.

To resolve this issue, one solution has been taken by Mejiro University that is for students to take subjects with the similar contents from other departments when the departments are running those subjects. And the subjects are counted as the alternative subjects to be taken in Japanese Language Department. But in case other departments do not have such kinds of subjects, Japanese language lecturers must study about the subject themselves in order to be able to teach the students.

Requesting co-operation from organizations out of the university to cover unique Japanese specific culture like Japanese animation and Japanese food is considered very beneficial to the university. At overseas Japanese Language departments for example, Japanese animation reading has become one strong reason of learning Japanese language. According to Japan Foundation report in 2012, overseas foreign learners of Japanese language reached 3,980,000 people. Many of them have been learning Japanese language for their interest in Japanese animation and Japanese food. Therefore, giving introductory lectures on Japanese animation and Japanese food attract overseas students. These “Society-Culture-Region” subjects can be provided by experts from outside the universities.

## 6. CLOSING

Comparatively speaking, each university has its own concept for their curriculum design. Japanese language departments at universities in Japan base their curriculum design on the need to adapt to prevailing environment and globalized economic development. Language teaching is then not only about teaching Japanese language as a national language but as a foreign language in order to anticipate the continuously growing international enterprises and global economic demand. Overseas universities design their Japanese language learning on the basis of language acquisition as their prime objective, with less focus on non-language aspects. It is desirable that the two aspects receive equal weight to enable learners to be proficient not only in the language but also in other social factors.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, former National Osaka University of Foreign Studies, the present Faculty of Foreign Studies in National University of Osaka. Students start to learn majoring language from freshman as well as general subjects.



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## Appendix 1

### Curriculum of Japanese Language Department at Mejiro University

#### Common Subjects of the Faculty of Foreign Languages

##### Language Theory

- Introduction to Linguistics A
- Introduction to Linguistics B
- Phonetics
- Psycho-Linguistics
- Socio-Linguistics
- Contrastive Linguistics
- Applied Linguistics
- Verbal Communication

##### International Society Awareness

- Global Issue
- International Volunteer
- Organization and Role of International Agencies

##### Multi-culture Understanding

- Contemporary Asia
- Japanese and Japanese Culture
- Cross cultural Understanding

##### Risk Control

- Conflict Management
- Negotiation and Problem Resolution
- Risk Control

#### Department Majoring Subjects

##### Japanese Language

- Introduction to Japanese Linguistics A (Grammar)
- Introduction to Japanese Linguistics B (Phoneme and Vocabulary)
- Language and Psychology (Acquisition and Loss)
- History of Japanese Linguistics 1
- History of Japanese Linguistics 2

##### Society, Culture and Region

- Education of International Understanding
- Understanding of Foreign Residents in Japan
- Cross cultural Interaction
- Foreigners with Japanese Descent
- Japanese Expressions for Global Community
- Asia-Pacific Regional Studies
- Introduction to Overseas Education System
- Language and Culture of Brazil A
- Language and Culture of Brazil B
- Japanese Literature (Ancient Era)
- Japanese Literature (Semi-Ancient era, the Heian Period)
- Japanese Literature (Medieval era)
- Japanese Literature (Modern era)
- History of Japanese Literature
- Introduction to Japanese Literature
- Japanese Literature and the Race

Language and Society of Japan 1 (Japanese Affairs)  
Language and Society of Japan 2 (Japanese Affairs)  
Calligraphy  
Communication Practice  
Language Learning through Drama Technique

**Japanese Language Teaching**

Japanese Language Learners' Support  
Japanese Language Teaching Methodology  
History of Japanese Language Education  
Language Teaching Media  
Japanese Language Teaching Practice  
Special Session for Japanese Language Teaching Methodology

**Field Work Orientation**

Field Work Orientation1 (Domestic & Short)  
Field Work Orientation 2 (Overseas & Short)  
Field Work Orientation 3 (Domestic & Long)  
Field Work Orientation 4 (Overseas & Long)

**Seminar and Graduation Project**

Seminar on Japanese Language Education A  
Seminar on Japanese Language Education B  
Special Seminar on Japanese Language Education A  
Special Seminar on Japanese Language Education B  
Graduation project



**Appendix 2****Curriculum of Japanese Language Program for International Students at Center for Japanese Language Education, Mejiro University****First Intermediate N3**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Module</b>
<b>Japanese Language A</b>	General Japanese 3 Listening Comprehension 3 Writing 3 Reading Comprehension 3 Oral Expression 3 Grammar 3
<b>Japanese Language B</b>	Kanji and Vocabulary 3
<b>Society and Culture</b>	Understanding Japan 3

**Examination Preparation** JLPT N2

JLPT N1  
EJU (Japanese )  
EJU (Japan and the World)  
EJU (Science, Math.)

- *JLPT: Japanese Language Proficiency Test*
- *EJU: Examination for Japanese University Admission for International Students*

**First Advanced N1**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Module</b>
<b>Japanese Language A</b>	General Japanese 1 Listening Comprehension 1 Writing 1 Reading Comprehension 1 Oral Expression 1 Grammar1
<b>Japanese Language B</b>	Kanji and Vocabulary1 Essay Writing
<b>Society and Culture</b>	The Modern Phenomenon Presentation Project 1

**Examination Preparation** JLPT N2

JLPT N1  
EJU ( Japanese )  
EJU (Japan and the World )  
EJU (Science, Math. )