Application of the JF Can-do Model in Teaching Japanese to Non-Japanese Majors in Vocational College

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Abstract. The term “JF Can-do” comes from the JF Standard for Japanese-Language Education 2010 (the “JF Standard”) formulated by the Japan Foundation in 2010. It refers to the proficiency of Japanese-language learners in using the Japanese language in practical activities. The concept of Can-do mainly contains the setting of teaching objectives and the evaluation of teaching effects, which is pretty advanced for Japanese-language education. To address the problems appearing in vocational college Japanese-language courses for non-Japanese majors, this paper explores the establishment and implementation of a new Japanese-language class under the guidance of the JF Can-do model.

Introduction

The concept of JF Can-do is based on the JF Standard for Japanese-Language Education 2010 [1], a programmatic document developed by the Japan Foundation in 2010. It aims to improve Japanese-language learners’ competence in using language to accomplish tasks and competence in intercultural understanding, so as to “deepen mutual understanding through cross-cultural language communication” [2]. JF is short for the Japan Foundation, and Can-do is what it literally means, describing Japanese-language learners’ ability at completing the topics or tasks given by the teacher. It is because such Can-do varies with different people that the Japan Foundation has classified the difficulty of topics and tasks into six levels in three stages. That is, Basic User A (Starter A1 + Elementary A2), Independent User B (Intermediate B1 + Advanced B2), and Proficient User C (Fluent C1 + Master C2). The class implementer can classify expected learning objectives of each class into these six levels in three major stages, so that learners can easily grasp these goals and are allowed to perform self-examination and evaluation by referring to them after they complete classroom tasks. Furthermore, they can continue to improve themselves and overcome their shortcomings deliberately in their future studies.

Since the publication of the JF Japanese-Language Education Standard 2010, many scholars have carried out research and practice on the JF Can-do concept, and some solid results have been achieved. Xu Xiaoxiang analyzed and demonstrated the feasibility of the Can-do system in elementary Japanese-language education [3]. Peng Jin and Xu Minming compared the JF standard with the Japanese teaching standard in higher education and proposed guiding suggestions on the Japanese-language education reform in China [4]. Chen Tingting and Jin Lei analyzed the current situation of Japanese-language education in higher education institutions of China and they believed that the Can-do model should be implemented scientifically by combining the actual conditions of Japanese-language education in China and integrating it into the Japanese-language talent training program through various strategies [5]. Yuan Xiao and Shi Meng conducted a preliminary exploratory study on the application of the JF Can-do model in teaching Japanese as a second foreign language [6]. At the same time, Meng Xiandi practically reformed the examinations of elementary Japanese in higher education by the Can-do concept, and pointed out the significance of the Can-do-based reform to Japanese-language education [7]. Nevertheless, in either theoretical or practical research on the application of the Can-do model in Japanese-language teaching in higher education, the existing literature and papers in academic journals mostly focus on Japanese-language education for Japanese majors in universities and only a few studies explore...
Japanese-language education in vocational college, not to mention the studies on the application of the Can-do model in teaching the Japanese language to non-Japanese students in vocational college. Addressing the status quo of Japanese-language classes for non-Japanese majors in vocational college and referring to existing research, this paper explores how to construct and implement a new Japanese-language class under the JF Can-do model.

Analysis of the Status Quo of Japanese-language Education for Non-Japanese Majors in Vocational College: Taking the Suzhou Industrial Park Institute of Services Outsourcing as an Example

Because the Suzhou Industrial Park Institute of Services Outsourcing (SISO) where the author of this paper is working is designated as a “vocational college,” it pays more attention to cultivating students’ vocational skills than theoretical university education. In foreign language education, SISO does not set up special English-language and Japanese-language programs, but considers foreign languages as a tool to strengthen vocational skills and provides foreign language education in the form of “vocational skills + foreign language.” In this context, the author of this paper makes the following analysis of the status quo of Japanese-language education at SISO and the problems it faces:

1. Most of the students who choose to study Japanese upon being assigned to different classes according to foreign language at the entry of the institute plan to be capable of working in Japanese companies after graduation. But our research on the demand of Japanese enterprises has found that the language requirement for the talent they need is N5–N4 at the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) for science students and N3–N2 for liberal arts students. At present, the Japanese-language course at SISO is implemented over 3~4 semesters. The class of elementary Japanese is 4 class hours per week, 64 class hours in one semester. For starters, theoretically they shall at least attain the N5 level after three semesters of studying. However, the students’ pass rate at JLPT has been unsatisfactory. In the last analysis, I believe that it is inevitable for teachers to explore how to increase teaching efficiency within a limited amount of class hours and improve students’ self-learning enthusiasm after class.

2. At present, a majority of teachers still adhere to the traditional Japanese-language education model of explaining new words, grammar, and then passages and finally doing exercises in each lesson, i.e. teacher-focused education aiming to “spoon-feed” knowledge to students. This education model can allow students to have an overall and concrete understanding of vocabulary and grammar, but its disadvantages are obvious. First of all, as the teacher focuses on spoon-feeding too much, they neglect students’ ability to receive and absorb knowledge. Those students who are interested may listen to the teacher intently, but for the ones who take no interest in this or that knowledge point and the ones who find it hard to concentrate for a long time, they are not responsive to receive such signals. Therefore, whatever thoughts or effort the teacher has put into the designing of the course, all their labor is fruitless as long as students refuse to “receive.” Secondly, such unidirectional education places no emphasis on the cultivation of students’ practical skills in using language. Under this education model, even though students pass the JLPT and get a job in a Japanese company, they remain incapable of communicating with Japanese employees in Japanese. Therefore, we need to provide outputting channels for students in the traditional classroom. The teacher can learn their “reception” of knowledge points by students’ output of them.

3. Although the evaluation of performance in Japanese-language learning is not done based on the one-off final exam, written exams are still the way of evaluation. The grade in the final exam accounts for 40% of the total score, and the grade of daily performance accounts for 60%, which consists of the mid-term test and unit tests. This way of evaluation is favorable to students with a good memory, but it is inevitably unfair for students who are not very good at memorizing things but equipped with excellent oral expression.
Teaching Strategy under the Concept of Can-do

To address the above-mentioned problems encountered in Japanese-language education for non-Japanese majors in vocational college, the author of this paper tries to introduce the concept of Can-do into classroom and implement a new Japanese-language teaching strategy under the guidance of the Can-do model.

1. First of all, clarify the learning objectives of each lesson to students at the beginning of each lesson. Students should understand what language skills they would grasp through this lesson and how to carry out daily communication with what kinds of people in what kinds of scenarios. Secondly, the teacher only gives a brief explanation of the vocabulary and grammar and they can enhance students’ understanding of these knowledge points by making dialogues with one another and doing translation. What’s more, the teacher assigns “tasks” related to the learning objectives to students. If students are confused about any language points, they are obliged to look them up by means of resources on the Internet in order to complete the task. In this way, students’ ability in independent learning is trained unconsciously. Of course, students can also raise their confusions to the teacher, when the “central” role of the teacher in a traditional classroom is shifted toward the “organizer” of classroom implementation. In the meantime, students become the real center of the entire class instead. When the task is accomplished, by referring to the learning objectives set up by the teacher before the lesson, students can personally experience the sense of achievement brought by the fulfillment of these goals and are greatly inspired to acquire more knowledge. On this account, the author of this paper holds that such a new Japanese-language class under the guidance of the Can-do concept can effectively boost the self-learning enthusiasm of students.

2. Change the traditional spoon-feeding-centered classroom into a new classroom with outputting opportunities for students. The teacher arranges “tasks” in classes by following the concept of Can-do. The “task” can be a little composition on topics students feel interested in, a speech or debate on a certain popular social topic, or a play where students are grouped to play different roles. In this way, the teacher can gather how well students have received the language points they are supposed to grasp in each lesson through their completion of tasks, and students themselves can also perform self-examination and comparison with others by referring to the learning objectives the teacher gives before each lesson. Furthermore, following the suggestion of the Can-do concept that students learning records and results should be preserved, the teacher can document the process of students’ doing tasks into videos or audios and send them to students by email; the learning results of task completion and the teacher’s evaluation are put into special envelops for students to allow them to examine and improve themselves about their shortcomings after class.

3. Diversify the way of evaluation when grading students’ performance in Japanese-language learning. On the basis of using the grades in written exams as the evaluation standard, students’ completion of Can-do tasks is included in the assessment. Since Can-do tasks invariably involve the application of the five major language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating and require students to put their reserve of language knowledge into maximum use to accomplish the “outputting” assignments, I believe they can objectively reflect students’ practical skills to apply language. Besides, students’ learning attitude shown in daily performance is included in the evaluation. In summary, the author of this paper divides and arranges the evaluation of students’ performance in Japanese-language learning into the following sections and proportions: Daily performance 10% (including attendance, learning attitude, and participation in classroom activities); completion of Can-do tasks 40% (including individual tasks like little compositions and speeches and group tasks like role-playing); mid-term exam 10%, and final exam 40% (these exams remain written tests with questions similar to those of the JLPT). In the following, I will explain the evaluation of each type of Can-do tasks in real examples according to the JF standard.

Application of the Can-do Model in Japanese-language Classroom

As students start practicing in enterprises in the first semester of junior year, to adapt students to the environment of companies and better connect their knowledge acquired in school with the actual
work, Japanese-language teachers mostly will open a course of Practical Japanese Skills Training in the second semester of sophomore year. Take the Japanese-language class for software students at SISO as an example. The class implements modular teaching of practical skills with textbooks integrated and compiled by teachers with years of experience working in Japanese companies according to their own work experience, online materials and related textbooks. The units of the modular teaching are job interview, Japanese enterprise culture, making and answering phone calls at work, attending conferences and keeping conference records, etc. In the following, I will use the unit of job interview as an example to illustrate the course design based on the Can-do model.

1. The scene for the dialogue in this lesson is Job Interview. By referring to Japanese-Language Proficiency Level B1 under the Can-do concept, the author of this paper designs the learning objectives of this lesson as follows: ① Can fill out the resume templates provided by the teacher according to the actual conditions and complete the resume for the job interview; ② Can make a brief self-introduction in Japanese about their name, age, school, interests and hobbies, and qualifications; ③ Can use the necessary polite expressions correctly during the interview; ④ Can basically understand the questions from the interviewer; ⑤ Can come up with simple answers to the questions of the interviewer.

After setting up the learning objectives, the teacher provides three Japanese-language resume templates for students to refer to and modify their own resume. Then the teacher lists and explains the common sentence patterns that will be used in the self-introduction and job interview. The teacher gives comments and improvement suggestions on the completed resumes of students and the paper version of their self-introduction.

2. Divide students into groups of two members and carry out the following teaching activity of role-playing in the scene of Job Interview:

Table 1. Evaluation Criteria for the Unit of Job Interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Can-do Resume Making</th>
<th>Can-do Role-Playing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent (5)</td>
<td>Smooth expression, proper use of words and grammar, can express ideas correctly</td>
<td>Correct and proper use of polite expressions, correct and fluent sentences,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and fluently.</td>
<td>can speak fairly logically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good (4)</td>
<td>The use of words and grammar is generally correct, smooth sentences, can express ideas</td>
<td>Correct use of polite expressions, no obvious mistakes with words and grammar,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>correctly.</td>
<td>can correctly express ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory (3)</td>
<td>Contain a few grammatical mistakes, can roughly express ideas.</td>
<td>Use of polite expressions, contain some mistakes with words and grammar but can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>roughly express ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure (1)</td>
<td>Contain a lot of mistakes with words and grammar, irregular incomprehensible sentences.</td>
<td>Lack of use of polite expressions, can only mechanically list answers with hints from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the other party.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because the job interview also involves some Japanese etiquette and culture, the teacher will display related pictures and play relevant videos before the role-playing to promote students’ understanding and emulation.
3. Evaluate the completion of Can-do tasks. The evaluation method under the concept of Can-do not only enables the teacher to determine the performance of students, but also students can perform self-assessment according to the evaluation standards formulated by the teacher and the members of the same group can offer a third-party evaluation. Since the Can-do task implemented in this class is made of resume writing and job interview, the author of this paper has created the evaluation criteria for reference, which are shown in Table 1. The part of resume (including self-introduction writing) can be evaluated by the teacher, while for the role-playing the student and his or her group member can evaluate the performance of each other.

Conclusion

This paper analyzes the problems appeared in the current Japanese-language education for non-Japanese majors in vocational college, and preliminarily explores how to apply the JF Can-do model in practical classroom teaching. It has found that compared with the traditional education model, the Japanese-language education under the JF Can-do model, that is, firstly clarify learning objectives, then complete Can-do tasks and finally conduct self-examination and criticism according to the evaluation criteria, is beneficial to stimulating students’ motivation and enthusiasm toward Japanese-language learning and improving their practical language skills and cross-cultural understanding. Therefore, the author of this paper believes that it is effective and advanced to apply the JF Can-do model in classroom Japanese-language education for non-Japanese majors in vocational college. In future research, the author intends to design more Can-do tasks that are more appropriate for vocational college students learning the Japanese language and the corresponding evaluation criteria and scoring systems.

References

[1, 2] Information on https://jfstandard.jp/