



JALT JAPANESE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
NEWSLETTER 9 (1), [serial 19], Early Summer 2012

Mission Statement

The mission of the Japanese as a Second Language Special Interest Group (JSL SIG) of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) is to serve as a resource for promoting JSL teaching, learning and research. We welcome JSL teachers, learners, and researchers to join and take an active role in our SIG.

Message from the Coordinator

Dear JSL SIG members,
Hope this greeting finds you well. The 11th Annual Pan SIG Conference will be held on June 16-17, 2012, at Hiroshima University (Higashi-Hiroshima campus). There will be JSL SIG Forum entitled “looking for the universal teaching method in teaching Japanese” and other JSL related presentations. Would you like to join us? Please visit <http://www.pansig.org/2012/> for further information.

Megumi Kawate-Mierzejewska



Message from the Newsletter Editor

I believe you have started a fresh and exciting new school year. Thank you for your continuing support and cooperation. The JSL newsletter is also renewed and refreshed! This issue starts with a collection of Japanese self-learning methods: English sensei targets on kanji; Davies sensei, reading; Schwartz, keigo. Secondly, you can read a letter from Matsuzawa sensei, who teaches business Japanese in China. Thirdly, in the Teaching Ideas section, Noguchi sensei explains about Comprehensive Communication Ability and introduces a lesson procedure. I appreciate all the supporters and contributors for this issue. Any feedback is truly appreciated either directly to the author, or to the editor. Enjoy the young green color and the sunshine in this season!

Nozomi Takano

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■Pan-SIG Conference■



The 11th Annual Pan-SIG Conference, “Literacy: SIGnals of emergence,” will be held on June 16-17, 2012 at Hiroshima University (Higashi Hiroshima campus).

Literacy traditionally has meant comprehending and producing written texts. More recently, critical literacy has focused on the ability to question and analyze these texts and see them in their social context. In addition, the concept has been broadened to cover visual images and technology, i.e., digital literacy and media literacy. In first language contexts, universal literacy is a stated goal local and national education authorities to international bodies. As foreign language educators, how do we understand literacy, and how do these understandings inform our teaching and research?

Plenary Speakers

Dr. Thomas Cobb, *Université du Québec à Montréal*
Title: “Literacy: SIGnals of emergence”

Dr. Hiromi Nagao, *Hiroshima Jogakuin University*

Dr. Toshihiko Shiotsu, *Kurume University*
Title: “Researching the Component Skills of L2 Readers”

<http://www.pansig.org/2012/>

JSL SIG Officers

Coordinator

Megumi Kawate-Mierzejewska
Email: jsl@jalt.org
Email: megumik@temple.edu

Program Chair

Sayoko Yamashita
Email: yama@meikai.ac.jp

Membership Chair

Larry Bankester
Email: lb4318@gmail.com

Treasurer

Minami Kanda
Email: kanda@hiu.ac.jp

Publications Chair

Timothy Newfields
Email: timothy@toyo.jp
Megumi Kawate-Mierzejewska
Email: megumik@temple.edu

Publicity Co-Chairs

Peter Sakura
Email: psakura2004@yahoo.co.jp
Nozomi Takano
Email: nozomitakano@yahoo.com

Website Manager

Timothy Newfields
Email: timothy@toyo.jp

Record

Juliane Yaxuan Yo
Email: clericon@yahoo.com.tw

Newsletter Editor

Nozomi Takano
Email: nozomitakano@yahoo.com



Train Kanji for Beginners

– Learn to Read Kanji Station-to-Station

Brian English

Tama University
english@tama.ac.jp



Recently, I ran into a fellow expat. As we talked, he told me he lived in Kami-Hoshikawa. I replied, “Ah, that’s the upper Star River.” He looked very confused so I explained that I enjoy studying the Chinese characters of train stations to help me remember words. He laughed and then explained that although he had been living in Kami-Hoshikawa, he had always thought it meant: “God wants River.” My new friend’s mistaken assumption might be common among Japanese language learners who have not studied how to read Kanji. Therefore, I told him that the character “hoshi” (星) means star and is made up of 生 and 日 which combine to mean something like the “life of a sun”. He was quite fascinated by how easy it was to learn Kanji from station names. Furthermore, since he knew the name of his station, he should be able to easily remember other expressions such as 流れ星 (shooting star) or 勝ち星をあげる (be victorious).

The concept of learning Kanji from train stations is something another expat had explained to me some 25 years ago when I first arrived in Japan. At that time, I was living in Tokyo so I started with stations I knew. The easiest place was Roppongi (六本木) or “six trees”. From that name, I quickly learned how

to write the number six, book and tree. Learning three characters so quickly motivated me to study more. A Japanese friend advised me to learn several words for each character to expand my vocabulary as well as help me remember the Kanji character’s meaning. He taught me several words for 本 such as 本屋 which was useful when looking for a bookstore. He added that the character had a nuance of “root” or “origin” as is understood in such common words as 本人, 本物 and 本当.

Excited about learning Kanji and useful Japanese vocabulary, I decided to study station-to-station on the Yamanote line. I began with the name of the train (山の手) or “mountain’s hand”. I quickly learned that 手 can be pronounced “te” or “shu” and was half of a word I already knew well, 上手. Interestingly, 上 is also pronounced “ue” as in 上野, one of the stations on the Yamanote line. As a beginner learner of Japanese, I recognized that 上 is an important preposition of place for expressions like テーブルの上. Suddenly, leaning Kanji seemed as connected as the stations in Tokyo.

In those days, the closest station on the Yamanote to my apartment was 新宿 or “new lodgings”. Although I knew the adjective “新しい”, that was when I first learned how to recognize the Kanji for the word. It also helped me learn a multitude of “shin” words, such as 新学期, 新婚, 新発売 and 新年. Learning so many *new* words thus began my new adventure to learning Kanji characters from station-to-station.



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The Power of Reading

Glenn Davies

Temple University Japan Campus
davies@tuj.temple.edu



There is no getting around it. As much as people may dislike it, avoid it, or save it for later, reading can really help develop Japanese language ability and help with a number of the common problems that learners of Japanese encounter. Not a lightning bolt from the sky I’m sure you will agree, but an important message for all that study and work hard to develop their Japanese skills. For me personally it was a case of *practicing what I had been preaching*. After teaching English in Japan for over 10 years and constantly advising my students to take reading seriously as a way to develop to the next step with their English skills, it was time to do this myself. And so, after a number of stuttering starts I pushed myself to do it.

So, how to begin? It’s obviously a little daunting at first when you consider the pure volume of katakana, hiragana, and kanji out there. Naturally this is an area of language study that will require a little effort and energy on the student’s part, but there are a few ways to ease into it as follows:

Start small

A number of people tend to dive in and after a few weeks of energy and interest, find the novelty wearing off pretty quickly. Books then tend to stay on shelves never to be seen again. Do start small; look to select books that are

at/slightly above your current level, and at a length you are comfortable with. I would especially recommend selecting books that have multiple short stories so that the topics vary and each story is a manageable size. Smaller stories that can actually be completed are far more satisfying and motivating than larger texts that most give up on after a chapter or two. At this stage there is also no need to spend a great deal of money on books. Most local 100 yen stores provide a number of beginner-range children’s or young learner level books that can be very useful in the early stages of reading development. The idea of this is reflected in the use of graded readers throughout ESL and the theme of meaning focused input that comes up again and again in good language learning theorem.

Go with what you know

A lot of the motivation in reading comes from being interested in the material itself. As a result it is clearly important, especially at the mid-to-higher level stages, to select books or reading materials that you are *actually* interested in. As a result the material and language you study will provide far more meaningful input to you as a learner. This will seem fairly obvious to most, but the number of Japanese students I have seen attempting to read books they have no interest in astounds me. Naturally boredom sets in pretty quickly if you do so and motivation plummets.

I worked my reading skills up to Sports newspapers because of the simple fact that I love Japanese baseball. I wanted to be able to read the sports papers, and did not feel the frustration and drop in motivation I felt when I initially tried regular newspaper articles etc. The other benefit of working with reading material of interest is that quite often you have a better sense of its structure and meaning through experience with the same kind of material in your own language. Again, this puts you one step ahead on the way to developing your overall Japanese skills.

TV is your friend.

This maybe painful for some but the kanji is right there. Japanese TV shows go out of there way to present the written word on almost every TV shows as its being said. It really is a gold mine of Japanese listening and reading training and development. Some of the programs are not to everyone's tastes but in many of the programs the level of the language, the repetition and types of situations the language is written on the screen in can really help. It's real Japanese, its right there, and its useful.

Keep notes/make notes

This does not necessarily mean that you have to write in Japanese, but if you do it really does help fix the words you learn in your long term memory. The more you interact with the vocabulary you come across in reading, and by writing, the more likely it is that it will stick. Most of the latest more readily accepted theories of language learning note the importance of meaning focused input through a certain amount of writing.

Stick with it

If you push yourself to keep going with reading you will find that the reading/language skills you are developing will also affect your general listening and speaking skills too. I noticed fairly early on that the number of the words and phrases I picked up through reading were far more common on TV, in the news, at work, and in general conversation that I had thought. You will find yourself *using* the language you have read; something that naturally improves your overall fluency.

In closing I would just like to say that reading can really make the difference you are looking for. It has an astounding affect on your active vocabulary, sense of Japanese structure, and overall communicative ability. Ignore it at you peril.

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**Keigo Experience in
an American Restaurant in Japan**

Peter Schwarz
Tama University
21131166mw@tama.ac.jp



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Before I came to Japan I didn't know much about Keigo. I knew that this honorific language does exist, but until I began to live in Japan I did not know about its complexity, and I was really surprised about it. There are three types of Keigo: sonkeigo (respectful language), kenjogo (humble language), and teineigo (polite language). In German, which is my native language, there is a honorific language as well, but it's not nearly as difficult. At the beginning here in Japan I really had a hard time with using Keigo and therefore quite honestly hated it. However, as time passed I gradually got used to it and began to appreciate and even like it; having said that, I still think that Keigo is extremely complicated. The type of Keigo you have to use changes depending on the situation, and my biggest problem is to decide when to use which proper form.

About three month ago I started a part time job in an American restaurant in Yokohama. It was going to be my first job experience in Japan, and I was very nervous and concerned. "How will be the team work?", "Will they accept me as a member?", or "What are they going to teach me first?"

I was asking myself these kinds of questions. However, my concerns vanished within a few days after my boss taught me first of all the proper way to talk with guests. Of course, he did explain me the menu etc. as well, but Keigo was the focus at first.

I initially thought that Keigo would be similar in most restaurants, but I realized that that is not the case at all. Indeed, in each restaurant the waiters have to talk politely, but in my restaurant I had to talk in a slightly more casual and friendlier way, and be more outgoing. For instance, instead of just taking the order as a waiter in an ordinary Japanese family restaurant does, they expect you to have a small conversation with your guest, "It's freezing outside today, isn't it?", "Great to see you could do a lot of shopping" etc., to make them feel comfortable. Another difference to a "normal" Japanese restaurant is that a lot of adopted words from English written in Katakana are used instead of the traditional Japanese word. For example, "onomimono" is "dorinku", "gohan" is "raisu". We even say "haba naisu ibuningu" when a guest leaves.

What else I've experienced in terms of Keigo is the manner between guest and waiter. There are good and bad guests in each and every country, that is not deniable. However, the difference in use of words seems to be extreme in Japan. The waiter obviously always has to talk politely, but on the other hand, guests might say very rude, "Bring me a water!", or "Isn't the meal ready yet?" At the beginning, those comments sounded like commands in an army, and I was quite shocked. In Switzerland, where I grew up, guests normally tend to talk politely with their waiters because if they do not, the service is likely to decrease. I really felt that the customer is KING in Japan. I always used to believe that guests would speak politely as well, because Keigo is such a major part of the Japanese language, but apparently I was wrong.

Overall, these experiences have showed me how essential Keigo is in people's relationship, and that the use of words can completely differ according to the circumstance.

Last but not least, as I mentioned already, I initially had a critical opinion about Keigo, and I thought that life in Japan would be much easier without it. Nevertheless, now I think that the longer you live in Japan, the more you will appreciate and like it. Keigo is indeed complex, and it can be tiresome, if you consider that even native Japanese speakers have to learn it, but Keigo is a part of Japanese culture and therefore essential.

Furthermore, I think it's impossible to acquire the knowledge simply by studying. Nearly equally important is experience, and I'm grateful for having this opportunity to work part time. I'm convinced that I will benefit enormously from it when I begin to work. I'm not sure whether my Keigo skills have significantly improved in the past three month, but recently some guests have told me that my Japanese was very well, or I was very polite; these kinds of feedback make me really happy, and gives me motivation to study much harder. I hope I will learn much more about Keigo in future, and I'm looking forward to the day when I will be able to use it properly and talk just as fluent as a native Japanese does.



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Letter from China ①

Takashi Matsuzawa

IBM Solution and Services (Shenzhen) Company
matsuzaw@siren.ocn.ne.jp

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I came to China in 2009 after retiring from my regular job at the age of 60. Currently, I teach Japanese at a company in Shenzhen, which borders Hong Kong. In this essay I will share some personal views about China and its people.

Let me first briefly introduce myself. For some years I had considered teaching Japanese overseas after retiring to contribute at a personal level making Japan a more internationally respected country. To do so, I felt the need to get Japanese teaching skills as well as formal qualifications so I enrolled in ALC's Japanese Language Teaching Competency Course (NAFL) correspondence course. I was aware that the Japanese Language Teaching Competency Test by JEES is difficult. However, after giving up my hobby of playing golf – roughly 20 times a year – and studying most weekends, I managed to pass it on the second try.

As my retirement date got closer, I started reading ads about teaching Japanese in Asia. One day, I came across an American friend at work. This person was in charge of an off-shore IT business with branches in many Asian countries. When I told her about my retirement plans, she suggested that I teach in Shenzhen since businesses there with Japanese clients were rapidly expanding. Shenzhen is a place with many Chinese who need to use Japanese at work. I immediately sent a note to the site executive. At first her response was lukewarm, but eventually she agreed to hire me on a two-year contract. Off-shore IT businesses do much out-sourcing to places such as China and India to cut labor-costs. Advances in IT and telecommunications technologies have made such a business model possible. Under such circumstances, the use of client's language is

mandatory for business communications. Perhaps because Chinese have an advantage in knowing lots of *kanji*, there are many Japanese speakers in China who can support the off-shore businesses from Japan.

Impression of Shenzhen

My first surprise upon arriving in Shenzhen was seeing many 30-story apartment buildings. They were almost everywhere I looked. Those buildings generally contain offices, stores and restaurants on the first and second floors so people living can be near their work as well. This life style seems to be popular here. Shenzhen has several subway lines, and main highways usually have 2-3 lanes per side, and many cars, including Japanese ones, appear to seamlessly weave through the transportation grid. Before coming to China, I imagined that despite its rapid economic growth, China still maintained a somewhat rustic atmosphere. Almost immediately after arriving that stereotype was shattered. Near the place I live there is a neat, clean shopping mall with a JUSCO superstore, Starbucks, Pizza Hut, and McDonald's. This stands in contrast to my hometown of 300,000 in Japan which has none of these amenities.

According to the municipal government website, the current population of Shenzhen is 14 million – an incredible increase from 30,000 in 1979 just before China's economic open-door policy came into effect. Most of the citizens are from all over China, flocking here to seek economic opportunities. Even though Shenzhen is part of Guangdong (Canton) province, Mandarin Chinese predominates rather than Cantonese. If you look around carefully, you can find old 8-story apartments among Shenzhen's modern skyscrapers. Those apartments, without exception, have iron bars on all windows and verandas. Those bars are designed to protect the residents from thieves. Personally, I think it makes the apartments seem like bird cages, but at certain times protection may be more important than comfort.

My students

I will give a brief overview of my students. At first, I was impressed by their generally high skill level of Japanese language. But, since they are expected to do business in Japanese, perhaps this is not so surprising. I taught more than 300 employees last year, and 76% of them have passed either the Level 1 or the new Level N1 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). Most of them have studied Japanese a little over four years. Many majored in Japanese at university and graduated with JLPT Level 1 certifications. About 69% of the students are female, and 87% of them are in their twenties.

I also noticed a number of subtle cultural differences. For example, since my classes are held during normal office hours, students are required to obtain permission from their manager or group leader prior to entering class. However, some students ignored this policy - coming to the class without registering. They simply obtained class information by word-of-mouth. About 20% of the students ceased to attend class without bothering to cancel. Such behavior would be considered unusual in Japan. Moreover, many Chinese cut classes for reasons that would be deemed unreasonable by Japanese business standards. Frequent excuses include the need to attend other meetings, workload pressures, or so on. Truancy is particularly problematic at presentation workshops. Those workshops consist of two 2-hr. sessions that are a week apart. The first session consists of a lecture, and the second of a recorded individual presentation exercise. However, regrettably some students do not bother to show up for the second session. The reality is that those attending both sessions like to see their recorded presentations. Without feeling upset, sad, or angry, I avoid penalizing students and remind myself to concentrate on those who do attend.

I give lectures without adjusting my oral delivery rate or expressions. I am pleased to

say that most students can generally follow without any problems. Unfortunately, senior employees whom I seek to instruct are often too busy to come to the class; therefore, the turnover rate for such students is often high. Job-hopping is another factor causing student attrition. I hear that many Chinese care more about their wages than the name value of their company. Last year my best student, who scored 100% on nearly all tests, resigned from the company. She informed me that she was heading to Japan to join an Internet shopping company that targets Chinese customers. I am tempted to say that Chinese women are more aggressive in developing their careers and finding better jobs than Japanese women.

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**In Order to Acquire
 Comprehensive Communication Ability ①**

Kiyoshi Noguchi

Sophia University

kiyoshi_noguchi@hotmail.com

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Recently, the International Culture Forum in Japan published "Learning Guideline 2011: Learning Chinese and Korean Starting at High School." Although this guideline is for the instruction of the Chinese and Korean languages, the aims of the guideline are applicable to any foreign language and I think this will influence Japanese language education sooner or later. So, in this column, let's think what we should do, if we follow the "Learning Guideline 2011."

First of all, let me introduce the main idea of "Learning Guideline of 2011," and discuss the kinds of activities we can do in our class using an existing textbook. "Learning Guideline of 2011" proposes a new value for foreign language education: for learners be able to live alive in this global society. It also holds up its learning aim "Acquiring comprehensive communication ability," which brings forward

a new area and ability: “global society” and “connection.” These two are joined to already existing areas, “language and culture,” and abilities, “understand and can do.” Because the new area and ability are added, the guideline sets more learning activities than before. In case of communicative approach, all you have to do is to carry out communicative activities in class; however, in case of comprehensive communication, you have to lead students to communicate in the real world, and it must be a part of coursework. If we follow the aims, we have to say that the content of existing textbooks is insufficient, since those textbooks were made without considering the new area, “global society” or the new ability, “connection.” However, it cannot be said that they are useless because, as I said, “comprehensive communication” is not totally new, but includes already existing areas and abilities. So what we should do is to think about how we can actualize communication in the real world using the textbook in hand.

In the textbook there are a variety of situations. Looking at these situations, let’s think of any possible communication activities in the real world. For this example, I will take an example from a beginner’s textbook: Lesson 9 of Volume 2 of “Situational Functional Japanese (SFJ)” written by Tsukuba language group. This lesson’s title is “*Byooin de; at a hospital.*” So class activities are carried out assuming possible situations at a hospital. But what kind of communication will be possible in a real world? Of course, we can say that going to a hospital and communicating with a doctor or a nurse will be communication in the real world. However, it is not good practice because learners are usually healthy, so we should think of a more realistic situation which all learners can do without any difficulties. For instance, communication with a shop assistant at a drugstore is much more practical because healthy learners can go, and also because of the similarity of the situation, we can use words, phrases, and grammar in the textbook. It is important to set appropriate communication

activities in a real world as the lesson’s goal first. Then, following the top-down approach, decide what we should teach by gathering up any necessities for the activities. The textbook’s words, phrases, and grammar will be helpful but may be not enough, since the situation is not the same. If so, we have to add, erase, or replace some items. The following is a brief description of the lesson.

In the case of SFJ Lesson 9

The aim: Learners find medicine they want by speaking to a shop assistant at a drugstore. On the way to fulfill the aim, learners are asked to critically think of any relevant items or situations; for example, they will evaluate Japanese ones by comparing them with those in their own countries. After the activity, they are asked to think over the entire process.

Class procedure:

- 1) Introduce this lesson’s aim to learners, and make them understand what they should do in the lesson. Actually, learners must find the medicine they want by asking a shop assistant at a drugstore; they do not have to purchase them.
- 2) Let learners think about what kind of words, phrases, grammar will be necessary to accomplish the aim: peer-work and class-work.
- 3) Teachers evaluate the words, phrases, and grammar that learners listed and correct or add more if necessary.
- 4) Teachers construct drill works and role plays for learners to fulfill the aim.
- 5) After the practice, learners go to a drugstore and find a medicine they want. At that time, if it is possible, they try to record the activities using an appropriate device, such as the voice recorder of a smart phone.
- 6) After the activity, learners give a presentation in class. At that time, learners also talk about their critical thinking and self-reflection.
- 7) Teachers evaluate their performance and presentation by rubrics.

Next time, I will introduce some project work possibly carried out at beginner’s level.

JSL Newsletter

Would you like to make a contribution to our SIG newsletter, sending your article to us? We are accepting articles, book reviews, conference announcements, conference reports, conference review, interviews, lesson plans, essays from your students, etc. from both JALT JSL members and your colleagues.

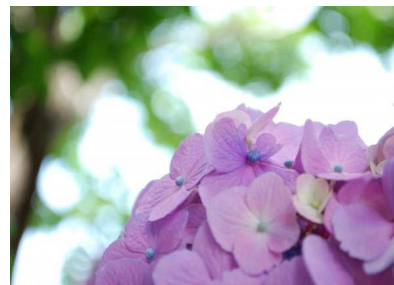
It would be appreciated if the author of the article could send his/her contribution both in Japanese and English. When you cannot find your translator for your contribution, please feel free to contact us.

The deadline for the next issue is **September 20, 2012**. We look forward to receiving your contribution.

JSL Newsletter Editor

Nozomi Takano

Email: nozomitakano@yahoo.com



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JSL Members

The JSL-SIG currently has around 80 members. To expand our network and share JSL information more dynamically, please invite your colleagues and friends to join us!

Benefits to be a member : Be able to

1. contribute a paper submission to the peer-reviewed JALT JSL-SIG journal, which is published bi-annually.
2. receive three SIG newsletters per year.
3. contribute articles, conference reports, lesson plans, teaching ideas, students’ essays, call for papers, etc. to the SIG newsletter.
4. present at the Pan-SIG conference (apply through the Pan-SIG official Web page).
5. participate the JSL forums as a presenter at JALT and/or Pan-SIG conferences (contact mierze@tuj.ac.jp for details).
6. attend JSL-SIG meetings and workshops.
7. request information of Japanese teaching materials, methods, cultural exchange, culture and society, pragmatics, etc. (contact mierze@tuj.ac.jp)
8. obtain the updated information of academic conferences and call for papers.
9. receive the member’s discount for the JALT related conferences.

How to join (if you haven’t joined) :

1. Become a JALT member. The easiest way is going through the JALT website, <https://jalt.org/joining/>
 2. On this application page, find Special Interest Group (SIG) section and choose JSL. You can join SIGs as many as you want (1500 yen per a SIG). There is also an option to become a JSL-SIG newsletter reader for 2500 yen per year without the JALT membership.
- * Please refer the JALT membership categories and fees on <http://jalt.org/main/membership>