

Analysis of the Development of Writing Ability in Japanese of
Non-Chinese Students

-- A Preliminary Study for Distance Japanese Learning by e-mail--

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I have been carrying out a project to teach how to write Japanese compositions to the learners abroad by e-mail. In order to discuss the results of this type of distance learning, I have to know how the writing ability in Japanese develops through ordinary instruction. The purpose of this analysis is based on this motivation.

89 compositions written by 11 non-Chinese (NC) students of Intensive Japanese II and III (for 6 months) at International Christian University were used as data. The textbooks were : Modern Japanese for University Students Part II and Part III.

The length and the structure of each sentence, the usage of expressions to connect elements, errors in particles, modality, avoidance and cohesion were checked in order to find out the development of writing ability. The compositions written by Japanese university students and NC students on the same theme were compared to know the features of the writing by the latter.

NC students gradually wrote long and complicated sentences. This was shown in the increase of bun-setsu (the unit of the elements which construct a sentence) and subordinate clauses included in each sentence. At this level, errors did not decrease. Typical errors of particles were found in the confused uses of WA, GA and DE, NI. Adding an unnecessary particle tended to decrease as the level went up. Over-generalization in the use of NO was observed but not as frequently as in the case of the Chinese students.

'-te' form was most frequently used to connect clauses and GA, NODE, TO followed. But, at the level of Part III, they started to use RENYOU-KEI ('-i' form). Since the Chinese students also showed the same tendency, the use of '-i' form in place of '-te' can be regarded as a phenomenon

which indicates progress.

The theme of a composition affects the use of modality. In the comparison of 2 compositions which were written on similar themes at 10-week intervals, sentences ending with zero modality (MEIDAI) decreased to half and more variety in modality was found in the second composition.

As for avoidance, a few passive expressions were used and correct usage increased after the 6th composition. Very few causatives, -te AGERU, -te MORAU and -te KURERU were found.

Comparing the compositions on the same theme ('MY Home Town') by the Japanese university students and NC students (10 each), the former wrote longer and more complex sentences than the latter but less in number.

'-i' form and 'GA' were more frequently used by the Japanese to connect sentences. GA used by the Japanese did not necessarily have the basic function to connect the two sentences to form a contrast in meaning. This suggests that at this level, we should teach the various functions of GA in relation to the context. 'And' in English affected the high frequency of TO of NC.

While the Japanese used 42 passive expressions, the NC used only 10. The Japanese used passive expressions in order to describe some features of their home towns from the view of the third person. The NC had not learned this type of the passive expression. If they learn this, their expressions in Japanese will be more natural.

The biggest difference between the compositions at the beginning stage and those at the final stage lies in cohesion. Cohesion within the sentence at the final stage could be proved by the increase of compound sentences. The increase in the vocabulary, especially of the conjunctions caused cohesion between sentences. Both the Japanese and the NC constituted ties using the same words. The NC used the demonstratives and paired words more frequently than the Japanese since their vocabulary was limited. The rich vocabulary of the Japanese affected the use of conjunctions, adverbs and other expressions.

The Japanese used KO demonstratives (this) but the NC used SO (it, that). We should study further why the NC preferred SO.

Although the number of errors did not increase, they used positively what they had learned in the classroom. Those who had not mastered the

basic structures at the beginning stage of this level continued to write ambiguous compositions until the final stage. I could recognize more variety in their expressions as their vocabulary increased, but the degree of difficulty in understanding meaning had not changed throughout all the compositions. This shows the importance of the elementary level.

These results suggest what we should teach to the students of intermediate level. How to use them best for the project of distance learning by e-mail will be my next task ahead.