

Online Materials: Now and Future

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Introduction

In this paper, online materials and their effective use will be discussed. We have been distributing materials on the web through the Japanese Language Material Ring since 2000. The Japanese Language Material Ring connects websites that offer materials in the form of a ring. Online materials have been increasing recent years, and we can predict that the demand will continue in the near future as educational uses of the Internet become more common.

We are material developers and distributors as well as Japanese language educators. We distribute materials we create to our fellow educators in the field. Although these materials were designed with clear educational goals, usage, audience, and effectiveness at our own institutions in mind, such custom made materials can be used creatively at other language programs as well.

Omoto will introduce useful online materials in the first part of this paper. In the second section, Ishida will present example of creative usage of online materials.

I. Useful Online Materials

I would like to introduce three online materials that I used successfully at the University of California, Berkeley. These materials were introduced to students as part of course materials. The classes were conducted in the computer lab.

1. Keiko Schneider's Bookmarks: <http://sabotenweb.com/bookmarks/>

This site has a large collection of useful bookmarks for Japanese language students. Using this site, students in the intermediate course performed the following exercise. First, the instructor guided students thorough this site pointing out some important features such as search function. Students were paired, then they selected a topic they were interested such as Japanese culture, Japanese language study, etc. They searched this bookmark site, and from there, they

went to the site appealed to them. They researched the site and summarized its content. The final stage of this exercise was to present the summary of the site they researched in class. Through this exercise, students realized that they could find necessary information easily using the bookmark site. Also, introducing a site they found to other students stimulated other students' curiosity. It is extremely important for the students in this level to be able to research topics that appeal to them instead of the topics given by the instructors. Students learned how to find necessary information they needed. This skill is inevitably necessary for them to become independent learners in the future.

According to the result of a quick survey, students' feedback on this exercise was positive. They stated that the bookmark site was easy to navigate, helped their study of Japanese, and they would like to use it more often.

2. Cyber Map Exercise III: <http://www.sabotenweb.com/classes/mapex3/>

Cyber Map Exercise III is an online material designed by Keiko Schneider with which students can practice locations and directions using maps. There are three main parts in this exercise: vocabulary, locations, and directions.

The vocabulary exercise incorporates pictures, Kana, English translation, and sound. It also has a test mode so students can evaluate their understanding. The location exercise section is basically the same format as the vocabulary exercise, however, there are also grammar explanations, self-practices, practices with a partner, and section for creating your own map. In the map creating section, you can move around the objects and create your unique map. Using the map students created, they can practice further. The direction exercise has more features including a Japanese-English matching exercise of the vocabulary items, listening practice, and a practice with a partner.

This site was designed to be used in class where an instructor is present as a facilitator although it has a component of self-study. At Berkeley, this exercise was used in the introductory level course in the summer of 2002. First, students studied locations, directions, and the necessary vocabulary items using a textbook in class. Then, they were taken to the computer lab, and used this site for additional practice. Stimulating students audio visually, this exercise enables students deepen their understanding of grammatical patterns and vocabulary. Cyber Map Exercise was not designed with any particular students in mind, however, vocabulary items and grammatical structures are general enough to be used at any programs.

Students' feedback of this exercise noted that they could internalize grammar through the exercises, that it is an effective study tool, and that they would like to have more self-study components in this site.

3. Reading Tutor: <http://language.tiu.ac.jp/index.html>

Reading Tutor was designed by Professor Yoshiko Kawamura at Tokyo International University in Japan. This site helps learners of Japanese improve their reading skills. There are three dictionary tools: Japanese-Japanese, Japanese-English, and Japanese-German dictionaries. Additional functions include Vocabulary Level and Kanji Level Checkers. This site is useful especially for intermediate and advanced learners.

At Berkeley, this site was used as a part of student projects in both intermediate and advanced level courses. Students searched the web to collect necessary information, wrote a paper, and presented it in class. This site is a powerful tool when students need to use resources in Japanese for their research.

Since this site has both a Japanese-Japanese and a Japanese-English dictionary tools, students can use different tools depending on their levels. For example, intermediate level students could use the Japanese-English dictionary and advanced level students could use the Japanese-Japanese dictionary. This site also allows teachers to judge the level of reading material. Based on the difficulty of vocabulary and kanji, this function shows you if the reading material is set an appropriate level for a particular course.

Students found this site to be very useful, and after the initial introduction to the site, many of them used it as a part of their study tools. They used this site to read difficult resources in Japanese. Advanced level students used it to define the meaning of Japanese words in Japanese.

Other useful sites we encourage students to use include Google, Yahoo!Japan, and Aozora Bunko, an Internet Library where you can find works by professional authors for which the copyright have expired (<http://www.aozora.gr.jp/>). NihongoWeb, which I created and maintain also contains useful information on Japanese computing and related topics.

Our responsibility as instructors is not only teaching students the materials themselves, but also instructing them how to study on their own. Thus, it is important to introduce effective tools students can use to become independent learners.

II. Example of Creative Usage of Online Materials

I would like to introduce usage of the online materials from two perspectives: as a material developer and as a material consumer. The first example demonstrates ways other educators have used the material I developed. The second example is my creative use of material offered by other educators.

1. Creative Use of “Kanji Practice”

In 2001, I designed a website called “Kanji Practice”. This project was awarded a Venture Fund Grant from the Academic Computing at Dartmouth College. “Kanji Practice” is a web-based Kanji character practice tool. Each page consists of the following elements: one Kanji character in large print, ‘*on*-reading’, which is a reading imported from China, ‘*kun*-reading’, which is a reading added to a character after the character was imported from China, meanings of each character in English, example sentences for each reading with audio, stroke orders demonstrated in a QuickTime movie, and printing variations of the character. Kanji are grouped in sets of 50, following the order used at Dartmouth. This site also has a search function and a help page to explain how to use the site. An extensive indexing system will be added shortly. The purpose of “Kanji Practice” is to provide students with a better tool with which they can learn to read, write, and pronounce Kanji more efficiently and effectively.

I designed this site out of necessity. Japanese language students at Dartmouth are introduced to all three writing systems in the three term introductory sequence. Students are required to learn to read and write Hiragana, Katakana, and approximately 380 Kanji by the end of the third term. In general, they master Hiragana and Katakana quickly. Kanji are more complicated and, therefore, more difficult to acquire. Because Dartmouth students are expected to enroll in the foreign study program after completion of the introductory sequence, the curriculum tends to focus more on listening and speaking skills rather than reading and writing so that students will be able to communicate with their host families in Japan. Because of this emphasis, the master teacher's classes do not include instruction in Kanji. Instead, introducing Kanji is the responsibility of the teaching assistants. Once introduced, students are required to practice them on their own. Unlike other elements of Japanese language study, students can learn kanji given an effective tool. Thus, I felt the need of developing a self-study tool for students to study kanji.

“Kanji Practice” has been featured in various educational websites such as MERLOT

(Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching, <http://www.merlot.org/search/ArtifactList.po?keyword=kanji+practice>). Such sites introduce “Kanji Practice” to be used as it is designed. However, there are some educators who are a little more creative. Professor Charles Kelly at Aichi Institute of Technology in Japan, for example, incorporates “Kanji Practice” into the kanji related material he created. He has a sample page for the Kanji 「日」. On this page, he has a link to the Kanji 「日」 page in the “Kanji Practice” as well as links to other kanji related sites. “Kanji Practice” makes this possible because one web page is assigned to each kanji and each page is independent. In another words, it has enough flexibility that the order of the kanji can be customized to other programs’ needs.

Instead of trying to create a multi purpose site on his own, Professor Kelly uses what already exist. It is not only Professor Kelly’s students who get benefit by his site. Since “Kanji Practice” does not contain lists of possible combinations of the target character as Professor Kelly’s page does, my students could utilize his site for practicing Kanji compounds. Of course, combining your original material and what already exist is not a new idea. In fact, the movie clips used in “Kanji Practice” were created by Professor Saeko Komori at Chubu University in Japan. Professor Komori and MIT had a joint project, and after it was completed, she made these movie clips available to interested educators in the field. I asked her for permission, and used them in my site.

Sharing materials like this should be encouraged. We do not need to create materials that already exist. There is a limit to what one educator can do. By sharing our skills and creating quality materials instead of duplicating existing materials, we could achieve our mutual goal of improving students’ Japanese language skills more efficiently.

2. Creative Use of Visual Aids

As I stated earlier, it is almost impossible for one educator to create all the quality materials s/he needs within the short period of time. Although I am a developer of teaching materials, at the same time I am a consumer of materials other educators created. In this section, I would like to introduce creative use of visual aids developed by other educators in the field from a consumer’s view point.

The material I often use are from Omoto-sensei’s NihongoWeb which has about 170 picture clips for nouns, and 70 for adjectives. There are about 100 verb pictures drawn by a professional graphic designer. They include 14 sets of pictures students can use to describe

stories. They are particularly useful for advanced level students to improve their ability to describe and explain situations and short narratives.

These materials were created to be used in the program at the University of California, Berkeley, where Professor Omoto teaches. At Berkeley, these are used in the course packet for the intermediate courses for grammar explanation and pattern practices. Story pictures are used to introduce well-organized way of writing Japanese passages.

As all language educators must know, it is not very easy to draw all pictures you need for your class. Thus, I use these materials provided by other educators as much as I can. Among NihongoWeb's material, I use pictures for nouns and adjectives most. These picture clips can be 'altered' as you need, creating even more possibilities.

I use a 'smart classroom' for my beginning level courses. I create a webpage for each day, and visual aids are projected to the screen in the center of the classroom. This method has two advantages. First, by projecting visual aids on the screen, they are enlarged and easily visible from anywhere in the classroom. Instructors need not hold visual aids, and they have more freedom to move about the classroom. Second, visual aids are on the web so students can use them for reviewing the lessons. Grammar explanations are also added to the web pages. Some students use them on their computers, others print them out for study. Most students said these materials on the web are extremely useful especially before chapter tests. They seem to practice patterns with their classmates by looking at pictures as well.

Having visual aids on the web has the advantages noted above, however, there are also limitations. Pictures and photos you can use on the web are restricted to copyright free materials. You can use the pictures you drew and the photographs you took, however, you cannot use materials you found on the web unless they are royalty free. Thus, such materials distributed by Omoto-sensei are extremely helpful.

Let me introduce the material I used to teach counters, *moo* + quantity expressions (additional quantity), quantity expressions + *zutsu* (each quantity). Colors were introduced in the previous lesson, and this material was used to review them as well. With Omoto-sensei's permission, I cropped, resized, and colored the original pictures.

Figure 1 shows clocks in three colors. There are two each of red and blue clocks in the first and the second lines. In the third line, there are four yellow clocks.

Using these pictures, you can ask questions such as what kind of clocks there are, (pointing at one clock) what color this clock is, how many red clocks there are, how about blue

ones, how many each of red and blue clocks there are, how many yellow clocks there are, if there are two each of both blue and yellow clocks, etc.

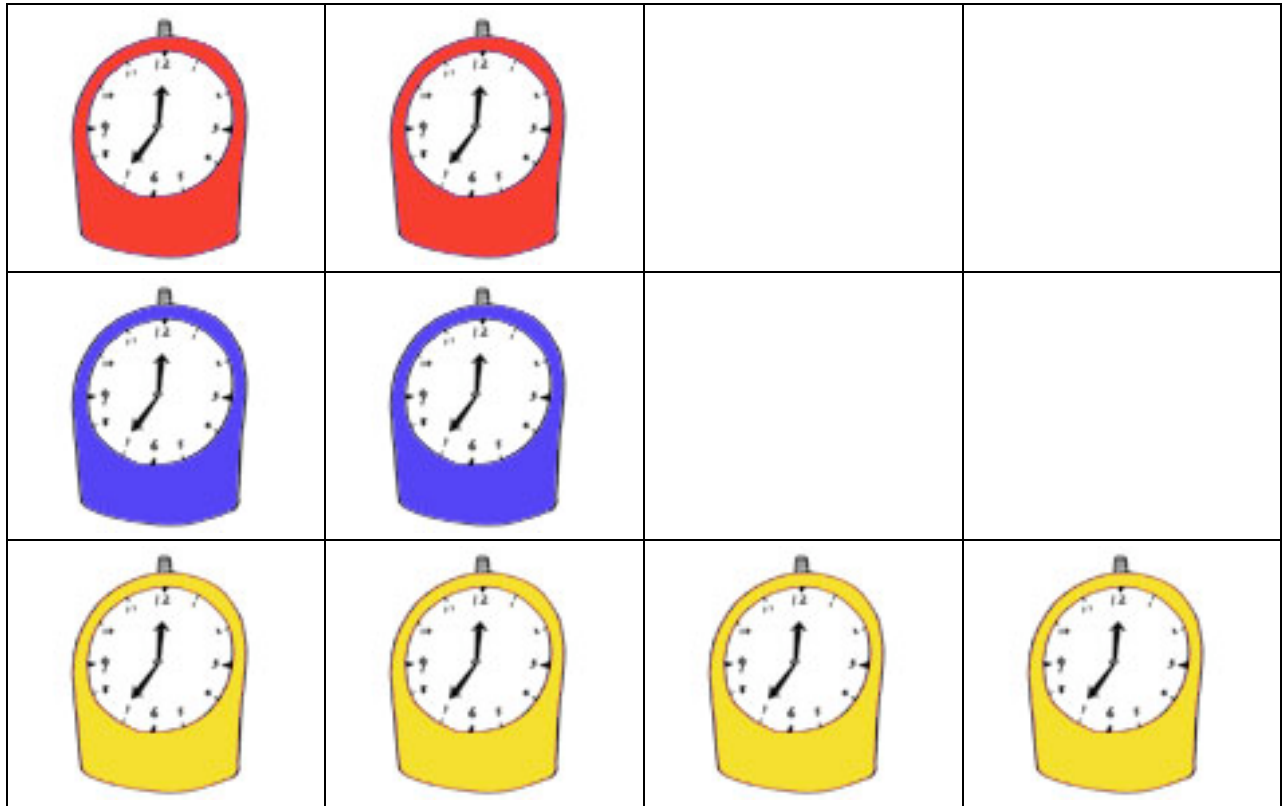


Figure 1

You can change objects and colors of the objects for additional practice. Using pictures in figure 2, you can ask questions such as colors of the T-shirts/pencils/notebooks, (pointing one object) what kind of T-shirt/pencil/notebook it is, how many there are, etc. Students have to choose correct counters for each object as well as either noun-colors or adjective-colors for these exercises.

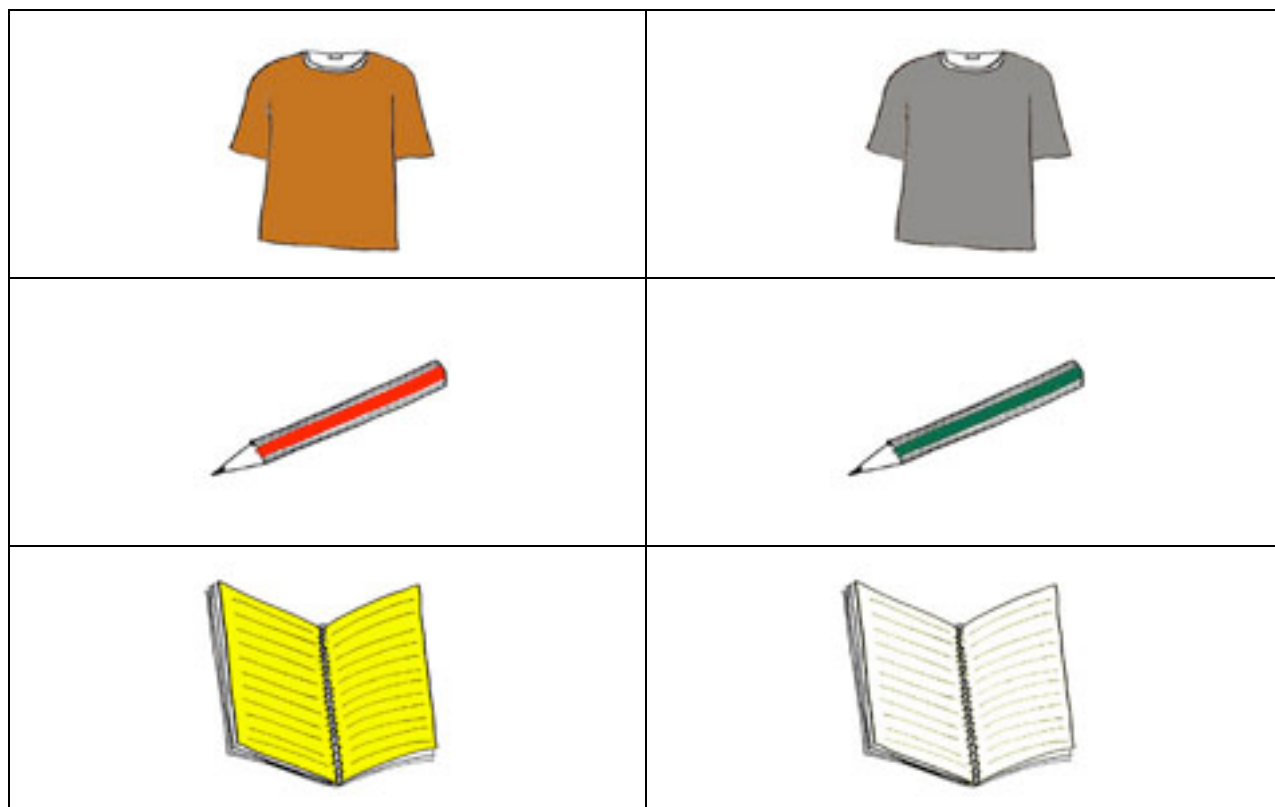


Figure 2

Conclusion

As both a developer and a user of online materials, I can envision a greater role for them in Japanese language pedagogy. The creative possibilities are endless. The next step will be to do a research on how online materials are used by other educators. We are planning to conduct a survey on use of online materials in the near future. The result would help us to assess what kind of materials exist, are used commonly and in demand. By hearing educators' voices, we, as developers of online materials could create and distribute quality materials educators really need.