

Book Review

Technology-Supported Learning In and Out of the Language Classroom: Advances in Pedagogy, Teaching, and Research

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ABSTRACT

The study of Japanese is growing worldwide, and in the latest large-scale survey by the Japan Foundation in 2015, the number of L2 learners of Japanese stood at over 3.6 million. A particular area of growth has been the study of Japanese in autonomous contexts by self-directed learners interested in Japanese language, culture, and society, and this has led to a growth in the number of mobile apps and web-based study materials and resources available to teachers and learners for in- and out-of-class learning. As with other languages, while the quantity has increased exponentially, the challenge now is often related to evaluating the quality and relevance of these digital resources. Like other less commonly taught languages (LCTL), Japanese has often been a marginal area of investigation within computer-assisted language learning (CALL) due to the dominance of English language education rather than a broader array of languages.

KEYWORDS

Autonomous Learning, CALL, Computer-Assisted Language Learning, Digital, Japanese as a Foreign Language, Learning Technologies, Pedagogy, Supported

The study of Japanese is growing worldwide and in the latest largescale survey conducted by The Japan Foundation (2018), the number of L2 learners of Japanese stood at over 3.8 million, an increase of approximately 200,000 since the previous report in 2015. A particular area of growth has been the study of Japanese in autonomous contexts by self-directed learners interested in Japanese language, culture and society, and this has led to a growth in the number of mobile apps and web-based study materials and resources available to teachers and learners for in- and out of class learning. As with other languages, while the quantity has increased exponentially, the challenge now is often related to evaluating the quality and relevance of these digital resources (Chun, 2016). Like other Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL), Japanese has often been a marginal area of investigation within computer-assisted language learning (CALL), due to the dominance of English language education rather than a broader array of languages.

Published in the Second Language Acquisition book series by Multilingual Matters, *Technology-supported learning in and out of the Japanese language classroom: Advances in pedagogy, teaching*

and research is an edited volume consisting of twelve chapters and an epilogue which aims to fill this gap in CALL research. The 19 chapter contributors come from Canada, Japan and the United States where they are teaching or have taught Japanese as a foreign or second language (JFL/JSL). Amounting to 343 pages prior to references, the book is a substantive intervention and consists of five main parts: Technology for Writing and Reading; Collaborative Online Learning; Creation and Analysis of CALL Provision for Learning Japanese; Learning Through Online Games; and Technology Beyond the Physical Classroom. The sections have been thoughtfully organised and the book is a welcome addition for practitioners and researchers in JFL/JSL who face challenges in examining the potential of CALL theory and practice and need to navigate this increasingly fast moving landscape.

In Chapter 1, “Technology Past and Present: The History of CALL and Technology for Learning Japanese”, the editors Zimmerman and McMeekin provide a valuable introduction to the volume, exploring the history of CALL research, particularly over the more recent integrative and ecological stages. They examine the challenges to integrating new technologies for Japanese and Asian languages, especially as a result of the language’s complex orthography.

Part 1 of the book, “Technology for Writing and Reading”, consists of two chapters. In Chapter 2, “Screencast Delivery of Feedback on Writing Assignments for Beginning Japanese Language Students: An Alternative to the Red Pen”, Langton explores how technology can be useful in providing digital feedback. Particularly important is the focus of on evaluating the technologies used, and the study is useful for comparing how screencasting approaches can be developed as an alternative to traditional paper-based corrective feedback with beginner level learners. Similarly, in Chapter 3, “The Pedagogical Value of Web-based Readings in the JFL Classroom”, McMeekin explores changing digital literacy practices related in particular to reading practices in the intermediate JFL classroom. The exploratory study found that the use of web-based materials were valuable in exposing learners to new forms of literacy, while also having positive effects on their motivation and confidence.

Part 2, “Collaborative Online Learning”, consists of two chapters which discuss the potential of online collaborative environments. Chapter 4, “Impact of Lexical Categories on Skype-mediated Multimodal Focus on Form and Vocabulary Learning: A Task-based Study”, builds on earlier asynchronous studies by Kitade (2000) and Toyoda and Harrison (2002), to explore how new technologies enable more synchronous forms of virtual exchange, particularly in the area of vocabulary learning and focus on form.

Chapter 5, “Identity (Re)construction and Improvement in Intercultural Competence through Synchronous and Asynchronous Telecollaboration: Connecting Japanese Language Learners in the United States and Sweden”, Takamiya and Aida Niendorf also explore how technologies can aid social forms of interaction and intercultural communication, but this time with an emphasis on revealing the complex aspects of L2 identity development.

Part 3, “Creation and Analysis of CALL Programs for Learning Japanese”, contains three chapters that each address the lack of CALL resources for Japanese instructors. Faced with the overwhelming bias in favour of English language applications given the international market, Japanese instructors are often faced with creating their own resources or adapting others. Chapter 6, “Rakugo CALL Program for Japanese Language Learning: Its Development and Possibilities for Implementation”, investigates the use of sociocultural learning approaches via a video-database of traditional Japanese comedy (*Rakugo*). Arising from the video clips, the researchers developed quizzes for learners to complete to aid their understanding of the genre. Findings based on interview data suggest that the approach has the potential to develop learners’ pragmatic competence. In Chapter 7, “Co-Chu: Japanese Corpus Analysis System and Two Analyses for Language Teaching”, the authors developed a digital corpus approach to aid learners in understanding collocations. Overcoming the restraints of previous attempts at developing corpora of Japanese, Co-Chu developed a user-friendly interface in an integrated solution. The research on learner use of the system indicated that both native and non-native speakers were able to benefit from the corpus approach in the forms analysed (*iku/kuru* and *chotto*), thus advancing the case for a more evidence-based pedagogy in in-class contexts. Corpus techniques hold particular

promise for understanding pragmatics and grammatical usage in context, enabling complex searches and analytical techniques. In Chapter 8, “How a Self-Learning Website can be Utilized for Better Pronunciation Education: Bridging Learning In and Out of the Classroom”, addresses the relatively marginalised area of pronunciation, both in and outside of instructed classrooms. Based on a flipped classroom approach, the research combined learners’ and teachers’ perceptions of the use of a website called *eNunciate* (out of class) with a social constructivist in-class approach. Arising from questionnaires and autoethnography, findings suggest that the out of class pronunciation training aided learners’ understanding, which was further developed in group learning activities.

Part 4, “Learning Through Online Games”, contains two chapters on an innovative area that is increasing in scope and significance across a variety of educational contexts, proficiency levels and languages. While games have often been used in the language classroom, digital technologies and applications have enabled them to develop in more sophisticated ways through the use of 3D simulations and gamification techniques. In Chapter 9, “The Effective Use of a 3D Virtual World in a JFL Classroom: Evidence from Discourse Analysis”, Yamazaki provides an overview of research on virtual environments and how they have been used in second language acquisition alongside interactionist approaches. Findings arising from a study involving 9 JFL students in a virtual world called *Meet-Me* which contains simulations of Tokyo suggest that such environments provide realistic opportunities for learner interaction. Discourse analysis of text chat indicated that immersive environments of this type provide technical challenges, but these were offset by valuable language use with native and non-native speakers. Chapter 10, “Game-mediated Activities in JFL Classrooms: Considerations and Issues in Learning, Teaching, and Implementation”, explores the use of games in a university-level JFL classroom involving beginner level learners. The study of the use of a vernacular game and supplemental activities and findings from a questionnaire showed that the learners reported positive learning experiences in relation to vocabulary and cultural information about Japan and gained valuable new digital literacy skills.

Finally, Part 5, “Technology Beyond the Physical Classroom”, consists of two chapters on distance and online language learning environments. In Chapter 11, “Distance-Learning and Asynchronous Communication While on Study Abroad: Conversation-for-learning and Journal Reflections as a Means to Enhance Language-use”, Zimmerman discusses a distance learning course involving two intermediate learners of Japanese on a study abroad course in Japan. Data from their written reflections and asynchronous activities involved distance learning with their instructor in their home institution and face to face communication with students from the Japanese institution. The distance learning aspects of the course enhanced students’ opportunities to critically reflect on their language use while studying abroad and led to noticing and corrective adjustments in their written work. In Chapter 12, “Learners’ Participation in Japanese-related Online Communities and the Relationship between Online Activities and Classroom Learning: A Comparative Case Study of Two JFL Learners”, Takeuchi compared two JFL learners from different backgrounds in an American university. The online communities helped to accommodate the students’ extracurricular activities involving both English and Japanese language usage, enabling them to contribute in different ways to communities of practice in which they developed relationships and pursued their interests while also learning the target language.

The book concludes with an “Epilogue” by the book’s editors, Zimmerman and McMeekin which reflects on the transition from earlier work on JFL and CALL by Nagata (2002) and Nakajima (2002) to the current context. The emerging picture from the findings that span these studies is the way digital technologies hold the potential for improving current pedagogical methods and learning outcomes, especially in relation to cultural learning, identity construction, bridging or supplemental language learning activities, and feedback. Future potential is evident in the area of mobile-assisted language learning in particular (Yamazaki & Yonemochi, 2018), and the editors call for more research in JFL and CALL that is generalisable, replicable and international in order to raise its profile.

In terms of limitations, the book does not address the current critical turn in technology-enhanced learning, and there is no discussion of the politics of educational technology (Selwyn, 2020) or the effects of marketisation on educational institutions. The many potential failures of technological disruption in education (Flavin, 2020) are also somewhat glossed over, and there is a need to adopt a more nuanced understanding of the forces shaping the digital innovation agenda in CALL if it is to learn from the past.

Overall, however, the editors have succeeded in tailoring the book to a broad range of readers, and the subject matter will appeal to postgraduates, researchers and practitioners alike involved in Japanese as a Foreign Language around the world. The book clearly has a practical focus and its findings should be of value to teachers who have to navigate remote learning as a result of COVID-19, as it explores how to integrate and evaluate learning technologies. The book's focus is always on exploring how technology can support the achievement of learning objectives and outcomes, and there are some valuable discussions of assessment.

As the chapter titles imply, one advantage of the book is the wide-ranging examination of many current topics in CALL research, including 3D virtual reality games, online collaborative communities, telecollaboration, corpus analysis tools and flipped learning, and the technologies are linked with topics of relevance to second language acquisition, such as learner identity and cultural communication, as well as the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). The focus on modes of delivery is particularly interesting at the current time, and flipped learning is explored alongside approaches to online, distance and blended language learning.

To date JFL has been a rather niche area within CALL and the book is significant in moving CALL forward within the field. In addition to the evaluation of various technologies, the editors and authors are to be commended for always staying focused on the primary importance of the pedagogical and theoretical aspects of CALL integration, and there is much to be carried forward in the future from their discussion of ecological and communicative approaches to Japanese language teaching, both inside Japan and in the wider world, as well as inside and outside instructed classrooms.

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