

JALT2007

Challenging Assumptions
Looking In, Looking Out

Developing a city guide webpage as a content-based project

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Examples of content-based activities introduced over the past few years focus on, first, giving learners input from authentic materials, and then developing the input into their own output. Thanks to developments such as the Internet, learners have opportunities to send out written or spoken messages and have them received both by other learners and native speakers of the target language. In this project, a city guide webpage was created in Japanese <<http://aits.utexas.edu/japanese/austinguide/>> with articles and video clips produced by learners of Japanese. The learners concentrated on how to express subjects they were already familiar with in Japanese. This project incorporated the *Five C* goals of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning, which are Communities, Comparison, Culture, Communication and Connections. Examining the survey results of learners' perception of this project, the benefits of these activities, problems encountered, and future possibilities are discussed.

コンテンツベースの学習の効果については各種研究があるものの、その殆どがまず学習者へのインプットに焦点を合わせ、アウトプットへと発展させるものである。インターネットなどテクノロジーの発達により、外国語学習者がアウトプットとして他の学習者や母語話者と自由にメッセージを送れる点を活かし、このプロジェクトでは北米の大学の日本語学習者が自分たちの住んでいる町について日本語で記述、あるいはビデオで紹介したものをウェブサイトとして集成。その実施概要とともに、5C/National Standards、すなわちCommunities(地域)やComparison(比較)を始めとし、Culture(文化)、Communication(コミュニケーション)、Connections(つながり)といった要素の取り込み例を紹介し、学習者への意識調査の結果を考察することで、プロジェクトを通じて発生した問題点、プロジェクトそのものの効果や応用の可能性などについても言及する。

According to Snow, Brinton and Wesche (1989) content-based foreign language instruction produces facilitated acquisition of a foreign/second language through the integration of linguistic and content material. Examples of content-based activities recently introduced focus on giving learners input from authentic materials and then developing them into their own output.

As Internet technology communications advance, learners have increased opportunities to send and display messages and have them received by other learners and by native speakers. With this in mind, university students were assigned a city guide web page project which included writing articles and shooting video clips focusing on learners' output, and targeted to a much wider audience than their teacher and classmates.

This project incorporated the Five C goals of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Communities, Comparison, Culture, Communication and Connections. This paper discusses the benefits of these activities, the problems encountered, and future possibilities for foreign language education. In addition, it examines the result of surveys of student perceptions throughout the project.

The project

The first step of this project started in Fall 2003 as an individual short composition in advanced reading in modern Japanese at the University of Texas at Austin in the United States. After all the articles written by learners were submitted they were categorized into several groups based on the contents. A student worker supported by the university uploaded each article and some related photos into a simple Austin City Guide website in Spring 2004.

The second step of this project took place in an advanced conversation class in Fall 2005. This phase involved creating video clips in Japanese to serve as a guide to the city. After the instructor assigned groups composed of three or four learners, each group wrote one script and then revised it

based on instructor feedback. Once they had a finalized script, students commenced shooting the video clips. Although the editing was optional, most groups edited their clips themselves. All video clips were viewed in class at the end of the semester and uploaded onto the website. The video project was repeated in Fall 2006 and Fall 2007.

Website

The page includes many categories on the left side. If the title has a [V] mark, it indicates that the page includes a video clip. All the information except location names and addresses were written in Japanese.



Figure 1. Welcome page of the website

The styles of video shooting/performance are categorized into three different types: *MC style*, *narration style*, and *dialogue style*. MC style requires learners to visit the

location they choose, and to talk to the camera in Japanese. This style necessitates that learners memorize their lines and fully understand the meaning of what they are saying so that their on-camera presentation comes across smoothly and naturally.



Figure 2. Sample scene of MC style video clip

In narration style, a learner narrates about a topic off-screen over pre-taped video footage. It is not necessary for the narrators to memorize lines. Therefore, they can focus on details such as pronunciation or intonation. This option is particularly useful to learners who shoot videos in noisy places. It is also popular with those individuals who do not feel comfortable appearing on camera.



Figure 3. Sample scene of narration style video clip

Finally, in dialogue style learners perform a short skit, introducing the spots through dialogue and acting. This type of narration might include a discussion in which the students explain to one another the aspects of their chosen topic in a manner indicative of a performance. This style serves as a good opportunity to practice natural male/female and group conversations.



Figure 4. Sample scene showing dialogue style of video clip

Student groups were allowed to combine the three styles as they saw fit. Most groups made lengthy presentations comprised of a series of clips pertaining to a common subject. Typical example presentations included: Date Spots in the city, Haunted Places in the city and Japanese Restaurants in the city.

Application of Five C goals in these projects

Learners knew they could expect native speakers of Japanese as part of the website audience. This had the fortunate consequence of allowing this project to incorporate the Five C goals of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning. Let us look specifically at each of the five goals and discuss how they were incorporated into the website projects.

Communication: To communicate in Japanese in both oral and written forms.

In these projects, learners were required to express, in Japanese, something they already know and could explain easily in English. This allowed them to focus on how they express themselves rather than on what they express. The survey had a question asking learners if they enjoyed the project and why. Responses indicated that students enjoyed this experience because they were able to learn historical or technical terms in Japanese easily. One student mentioned the opportunities to speak Japanese outside of class as one of the benefits of this project.

Culture: To gain knowledge and understanding of the Japanese culture.

Since project topics centered on life in a US city, learning about Japanese culture through these projects was limited. Currently, the information about Japan on the site is somewhat narrow in scope, including things such as Japanese restaurants, grocery stores, and weekend school. Nonetheless, learners did need to consider Japanese points of view. For example, they had to consider what in Austin might be interesting for Japanese people, and what kind of information might be helpful for someone considering living in this town. One learner's comment of why she enjoyed this project was that she was able to go to different sites in Austin that may be of interest for future Japanese visitors or residents.

Connections: To further one's knowledge by making connections with other descriptions

By viewing the output of other groups, learners had the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the town which they were already familiar with and perhaps to even become aware of areas previously unknown to them. Because this information was in Japanese, learners developed a sense of how to express common or familiar knowledge in Japanese. According to the survey, learners were excited that there were so many interesting places they didn't know about or had never seen before in Austin.

Comparison: To compare Japanese linguistic and cultural characteristics with one's own.

Because learners were aware native speakers of Japanese would view their work, they came up with various ideas to facilitate better understanding for this audience.

First, they took care to pronounce English loanwords using Japanese pronunciation.

Second, they added extra explanations if they presumed that the topic would not be familiar to people in Japan. For example, when commenting on a Mexican restaurant, learners might say "This restaurant is famous for a Mexican dish known as the Enchilada." instead of "This restaurant is famous for its Enchiladas." Another example of learners' sensitivity to the possible concerns of Japanese viewers of the website was that when discussing the nightlife they took care to mention that drinking in public is prohibited in Austin.

Learners who had lived and studied in Japan previously

provided greater input, often mentioning details that might be easily overlooked. For example, the suggestion was made to convert units into the metric system. Using kilometers for distance instead of miles and Celsius for temperature instead of Fahrenheit, yet learners who had never visited the country might have been, understandably, unaware of the potential for confusion. This kind of input from learners who were familiar with Japanese society turned the website project into a particularly successful experience for the learners who had never been to Japan because it gave them a deeper awareness of Japanese life and culture than if they had simply read a book. Moreover, consciousness of people in Japan viewing their work motivated learners to pay more attention to what in the US was familiar to Japanese people and what was not.

Communities: To become involved in communities at home and around the world using the Japanese language.

Once the webpage went online it began receiving feedback from the local Japanese community and even people in Japan. The website has been in existence for three years now and the student work has developed into an informative communication tool. The site assists local Japanese people who are not confident communicating in English, as well as visitors from Japan. One learner commented in the survey that a reason why she enjoyed the project was that it provided the opportunity to explain a lot about the city in Japanese; another learner was proud of being a part of a project that others would actually use. Through this project learners' focus shifted from the acquisition of Japanese language into the creation of more substantial work using Japanese.

The benefits of this project based on the results of the student survey

Surveys of class participants were conducted in December 2005, 2006, and 2007 during the class sessions after the viewing of each other's videos. The survey was designed to help understand the perception learners have about this project, and improve the projects.

The survey had fifteen questions. Students could answer each question on a scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* or they could write their comments in their

own words. All together, eighty samples were collected. The results of the learners' consciousness of Japanese language improvement were as follows:

Learners especially recognized their improvement in speaking and writing Japanese. The characteristics of these projects naturally focus on speaking and writing, and about 80% of the learners noted that they expanded vocabulary and grammar knowledge by expressing familiar topics in Japanese. Moreover, about 60 % of the learners admitted that they paid more attention to their performance. Their pronunciation improved due to the

Table 1. Students' perception of language learning effectiveness (Q1-7, 80 samples)

Effective in improving my___	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
speaking skills	2 (2.5)	6 (7.5)	22 (27.5)	44 (55.0)	6 (7.5)
listening skills	2 (2.5)	15 (18.8)	32 (40.0)	28 (35.0)	3 (3.8)
writing skills	0 (0)	1 (1.3)	15 (18.8)	49 (61.3)	13 (16.3)
reading skills	1 (1.3)	8 (10.0)	30 (37.5)	30 (37.5)	11 (13.8)
vocabulary	0 (0)	2 (2.5)	14 (17.5)	51 (63.0)	13 (16.3)
grammar knowledge	1 (1.3)	6 (7.5)	38 (47.5)	55 (68.8)	11 (13.8)
pronunciation of Japanese due to the awareness of the prospective viewers of the video clips	2 (2.5)	7 (8.8)	24 (30.0)	33 (41.3)	14 (17.5)

Table 2. Overall effectiveness of this project (Q8, 80 samples)

	Not effective at all	Not very effective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective
Overall effectiveness of this project in enhancing my Japanese	2 (2.5)	5 (6.3)	31 (38.8)	29 (36.3)	3 (3.8)

**Table 3. The reasons why learners enjoyed the project.
(more than two comments)**

Key word	number of the comments categorized to the key word	Comment samples
Group	35	I've gotten to know my classmates better. Our group worked well together.
Japanese improvement	24	Able to learn new Japanese vocabulary. It gave me a chance to improve my writing and speaking.
Fun	19	It was funny to make/watch.
Austin	14	I enjoyed showing some of my favorite places in Austin. It gives the opportunity to explain a lot about Austin in Japanese.
Creativity, Freedom	7	Creativity was not limited. Allowed us to be creative limited
Filming	6	I find media projects like this very fun Filming was fun, felt like a NHK/PBS special.
Other comments		It was nice doing a group project that others would actually use. Realized I have a lot to work on when it comes to pronunciation.

awareness of the prospective viewers of the web clips (Table 1). Approximately 80% of learners recognized an overall effectiveness of this project in enhancing their Japanese (Table 2).

In order that we might examine learners' comments in their own words, all the comments were first categorized into groups based upon key words or similar expressions. Then any ideas focusing on specific aspects were named, based on the main key word of each category.

Table 3 shows the results of comments on "I enjoyed this project because~". According to these results, learners enjoyed this project because they could work as a group. At the same time, they recognized an improvement in their

Japanese, especially in speaking and writing, as exemplified in Table 1. Moreover, many students mentioned the benefit of introducing the city in Japanese. They enjoyed exploring their own town with group members and learning how to express the information in Japanese. These comments also imply that learners focused on the contents of their writing and speaking in order to insure they conveyed their message in a way both understandable and useful to Japanese speakers.

Table 4. The reasons why learners enjoyed watching other groups' video clips (more than two comments)

Key word	number of the comments categorized to the key word	Comment samples
Fun, amusing, entertaining	30	They were funny. It was fun seeing the places that other groups went.
Others' ideas/creativity	23	It is fun to watch their creations/ideas. It showed a wide variety of ideas that were not thought of by our group.
Learned "Austin"	6	There are so many places I didn't know about before, or had never seen before. Got to see other interesting places in Austin.
Japanese practice	5	Each video had useful vocabulary for those learning Japanese. They were funny and good listening practice.
Self-evaluation of Japanese	5	I could see where I need to improve my speaking skills. See where I stand in term of my Japanese skills, compared to the others.
Other comments		It's a nice break from class work.

**Table 5. The reasons why learners did not enjoy the project
(more than two comments)**

Key word	number of the comments categorized to the key word	Comment samples
Scheduling among group members	19	Difficult to meet with group outside of class. It was a little inconvenient to find time when everyone could travel to film.
Time consuming	19	Took too much time outside of class. Video editing is time consuming.
Technical problems (filming, editing etc.)	18	I could not help [with] the video editing and this was a major problem. The editing was a bit of a hassle.
Equipment supply	10	Getting the equipment and software was a little troublesome.
Group members	7	One group member was not cooperative. My group was difficult to work with
Shortage of time	7	Did not have enough time to make it better.
Rejection of filming	7	Some places did not give permission to film. Encountered/ caused discomfort & resistance from filming at various places.
Other comments		Weather was cold during filming. I had to drive everywhere.

The next examination of comments addresses whether the learners enjoyed watching other groups' video clips, and why.

Of course learners simply enjoyed watching funny performances of the other groups, but they also pointed out that they enjoyed the creativity of other groups and found it a useful comparison to their own efforts. As for the benefits of watching the video clips, they listed primarily three aspects: learning more about Austin, practice of Japanese, and evaluating their Japanese. These comments imply that they

viewed this website as both a purely informative site that allowed them to learn more about the city and an educational site that offers Japanese materials. In addition, they viewed the site as a source for listening to and observing their own performance of speaking Japanese.

Problems encountered

Inevitably the learners and the educator encountered some problems during this project. First, I will discuss the

problems learners encountered, according to the student surveys.

Learners recognized several difficulties. The key words of their major problems are scheduling among group members, time consuming, technical problems, equipment supply shortage of time, rejection of filming. (Table 5)

Some of these problems might have been difficulties which were involved with any group undertaking, but others could be particular to this type of project which integrates language learning and technology.

Equipment and technology

According to the student survey, many of the major problems were technical, such as recording and editing the video clips and arranging for the use of equipment.

Although three video recording cameras were reserved from the University of Texas for about a month, most groups recorded in the last minutes before the tape submission deadline, causing a shortage of recording equipment.

Although editing was optional, most groups tried to do so. Unfortunately, editing seemed to put extra stress on the learners. This made the educator realize the necessity of arranging environments where students can easily access recording equipment and editing software and the importance of arranging the check out schedule equitably among the groups.

Permission of filming on site

While most places welcomed learners shooting video clips, several places of business such as restaurants and

grocery stores declined. Some learners found it difficult to locate places which allowed filming due to a fear of misrepresentation. This problem manifested itself for the first time in 2007. Perhaps businesses are becoming more sensitive to the impact of online information or management of their visual information. As a result of this problem some learners were forced to rewrite their scripts or change the topic completely. Doing so caused even more pressure and stress when learners had to reschedule their entire project procedure. Therefore, learners and instructors must be aware of the potential for both good and bad consequences when releasing information to the public and must report responsibly.

Besides learners' opinions, other difficulties were observed in the process of this project in terms of language learning.

Contents

Because the final product of the learners' work is accessible on a public website, it is necessary for an instructor to judge whether or the content is appropriate. Consideration has to be given to determining if anything on the website might offend someone or make people uncomfortable. Therefore, learners were encouraged to rewrite parts of their scripts if they included rumors from unreliable sources or expressions which had the potential to be regarded as calumnious. Also, if a script made statements that were too subjective or biased, writers were advised to rethink their description. Beyond these considerations, copyright issues sometimes required the learners' output to be modified. For example, some video clips used famous musicians' photos or students' favorite commercial songs as background music in their

video presentations. Such instances taught the educator the lesson that we need to inform the learners of copyright issues carefully in advance.

Language accuracy and non-verbal communication

The information in the city guide website needed to be very clear and accurate to be a useful tool for learning about a city through Japanese. However, sometimes it was hard to understand what the learners wanted to convey, as they were still in the learning stages of their development regarding pronunciation and correct kanji readings. Unfortunately, once video clips were recorded it was impossible to correct them. Therefore, oral practice should be encouraged before recording.

Beyond these issues with verbal communication, the importance of using correct non-verbal communication become apparent when viewing the video clips. When learners explained something in Japanese while using gestures they might employ when speaking English, it came across as awkward to native speakers of Japanese.

Judging from the survey results, this project can adapt itself to the change in learners' working hours outside of classroom by using more hours in class or careful arrangement of the technology by the educator. Comparing the survey results in Tables 4 and 5, it can be said that learners recognized the value of the project in enhancing their Japanese through paying more attention to the contents of their message despite the technical problems along with other difficulties involved with any group project. The benefits of this project could exceed the drawbacks by far by arranging the learners' environments.

Conclusion and future possibilities

This project is an example of the benefit of integration of technology and language learning. In most areas in the United States or other countries, it is not always easy for learners to converse with native speakers of Japanese in person. However, through this project they can send their messages in Japanese to an unspecified number of the general public who are native speakers of Japanese by uploading their message on a webpage. Furthermore, they can receive messages even from people in Japan using the viewer column which allows visitors to send an e-mail to the instructor. Thanks to the technology, learners' performances are not limited to a classroom. Now they can easily obtain an audience of native speakers and learners of the language all over the world. Neither time nor geographic distance are obstacles.

Moreover, the substantial goal of this type of project is to accelerate the learners' motivation and accuracy by recognizing that their work can be helpful for someone in the real world. Of course, basic composition practice, class speech, role play practice and so on are still the foundations to increase their proficiency. However, when these project activities become a tool to convey information to someone who really needs the information, rather than an artificial class assignment, learners cannot help but make an effort to enhance the quality of information presented and its language proficiency.

The overall structure of this project may have applicability to other languages, especially for any language whose native speakers are not readily available to converse with. The learners not only practice the target language but are

also able to absorb a certain amount of the culture. They assume the perspective of their target audience, determine what interests them and what confuses them, and adjust accordingly.

Usually, discussion of content-based activities focuses on learner exposure to input information of authentic materials in the target language. This project serves as an example of content-based output activity as well as input activity when viewing the website, and highlights the fact that learning within content-based guidelines need not require the process to be passive.

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Appendix

Survey Results: Video clips on Web Project Fall 2005, 2006, and 2007 (Conducted after the video clip viewing, 80 samples collected)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q1) This project was effective in improving my <u>speaking</u> skills.	2	6	22	44	6
Q2) This project was effective in improving my <u>listening</u> skills.	2	15	33	28	3
Q3) This project was effective in improving my <u>writing</u> skills.	0	1	15	49	13
Q4) This project was effective in improving my <u>reading</u> skills.	1	8	30	30	11
Q5) This project was effective in expanding my <u>vocabulary</u> .	0	2	14	51	13
Q6) This project was effective in improving my <u>grammar knowledge</u> .	1	6	38	55	11
Q7) This project was effective in improving my <u>pronunciation</u> of Japanese <u>due to an awareness of the prospective viewers of the video clips</u> .	2	7	24	33	14

	Not effective at all	Not very effective	Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective
Q8) Overall effectiveness of this project in enhancing my Japanese	2	5	41	29	3

	Not anxious at all	Not very anxious	Somewhat anxious	Anxious	Very anxious
Q9) How anxious were you during the making of the video as a result of being conscious that your performance would be shown on the web-site?	15	26	31	29	3

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q10) It was easy to prepare all the equipment we needed.	5	26	21	24	4

	None at all	Not much Problem	A little problem	Some problem	Major Problems
Q11) How much technical difficulty did <u>your group</u> experience in making/editing your video clip?	2	21	21	27	9

(List specific problems)

Editing : 11 (long time, difficulties)

Filming : 8 (weather, technique, obtaining permission, people showing up for the shots.)

Equipment access : 7 (digital video camera, software etc.)

Audio : 6 (malfunction, windy noise)

Converting (for editing): 3

Learning to use equipment : 2

Q12) I enjoyed this project because:

Key word	Total of comments	Comment samples
Group	35	I've gotten to know my classmates better. I made new friends. Our group worked well together. I had a good group. I had cool people in my group. Glad it was a group project. I was able to hang out with fellow classmates.
Improved Japanese	24	Improved speaking skills. Able to learn new Japanese vocabulary. It wasn't just practicing what we've learned, but it was applying it. I got to practice my Japanese. It gave me a chance to improve my writing. Opportunities to speak Japanese outside of class. Learned historical terms. Effective way to practice. Chance to speak in Japanese about topic we chose.
Fun	19	It was fun! It was funny to make/watch. It was fun making the video. It was fun going café to café.

Key word	Total of comments	Comment samples
Austin	14	I love Austin. I enjoyed showing some of my favorite places in Austin. It was interesting to try and see Austin from a Japanese point of view. It got me to explore Austin a bit more than usual. You get to go around Austin. We got to travel around Austin and visit sites. It gives the opportunity to explain a lot about Austin in Japanese.
Creativity, Freedom	7	We had a lot of freedom with guidelines. Creativity was not limited. Allowed us to be creative / fun / silly. We were able to see a multitude of ideas of where one could go and what could be done.
Filming	6	I find media projects like this very fun. It was fun to record. Filming was fun, felt like NHK/PBS special. Making movies is fun! I liked being on camera.
Other comments		Different method of learning. Don't have to perform in front of class. It was nice doing a group project that others would actually use. Realized I have a lot to work on when it comes to pronunciation. I learned something about editing. I got to eat food.

Q13) I did not enjoy this project because:

Key Word	Total of comments	Comment samples
Hard to get together	19	Difficult to meet with group outside of class. Sometimes it was difficult to find a time to all meet. Coordinating schedule was really difficult. It was a little inconvenient to find time when everyone could travel to film.
Time consuming	19	Took too much time outside of class. It took a lot of time. Video editing is time consuming.
Technical problems: filming, editing, etc	18	The editing was a bit of hassle. I could not help the video editing and this was a major problem.
Equipment supply	10	Getting the equipment and software was a little troublesome. Hard to find camera. (borrowed friend's.)
Group members	7	One group member was not cooperative. One of my group members made life unpleasant. My group was difficult to work with.
Shortage of time	7	Short on time. Did not have enough time to make it better.
Rejection of filming	7	Hard to get permission for some places to film. Some places and people were uncomfortable with us filming. Not many places liked cameras. Hard to get consent for the restaurants even with the letters.
Other comments		I'm not very good at public speaking, even in English. Weather was cold during filming. A lot of places have already been done. I had to drive everywhere.

Q14) Did you enjoy watching other groups' video clips?

Yes: 80 because:

Key word	Total of comments	Comment samples
Fun, funny, amusing, entertaining	30	They were funny. They were all interesting and amusing.
Others' ideas/ creativity	23	Everyone is so creative. It is fun to watch their creations/ ideas. It was neat to see their approach. It showed a wide variety of ideas that were not thought of by our group.
Learned "Austin"	6	There are so many places I didn't know about before, or had never seen before. Got to see other interesting places in Austin.
Japanese Practice	5	Each video had useful vocabulary for those learning Japanese. They were funny and good listening practice. Learned some things, good way to practice listening
Self-evaluation	5	I could see where I need to improve my speaking skills. I was able to compare my video to others. See where I stand in term of my Japanese skills, compare to the others.
Other comments		It's a nice break from class work.

No: 9 because:

Key word	Total of comments	Comment samples
Vocabulary	5	Some can't speak Japanese very well...I couldn't really understand them. They used vocabulary I couldn't understand. Other groups' vocabulary is sometimes hard to understand.
Poor Quality of audio	3	Sometimes the quality of video or sound was not good and difficult to listen to.
Other Comments		They were a little long, and about places I already knew.

Q15) Other comments/suggestion

Key word	Total of comments	Comment samples
Project schedule	5	Maybe start group project earlier. Because it can be hard for students to find times to meet outside of school, maybe allow for larger times in class to discuss the project with your group members.
Group members	2	Choosing your own groups would be nice. Let us choose our own groups.
Other comments		This was enjoyable and educational experience. Please continue it. My roommate was jealous about how my language class does cooler projects than his. Oh my goodness, embarrassing! It was a fun project. Audio and background noise was a problem seen by most groups. If possible, maybe have a larger amount of filming equipments to be used, as well as to better editing programs.