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Learning Japanese Beyond the Classroom: Recommended CALL Tools

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CALL tools have provided learners and teachers with numerous ways to enhance out-of-class learning experiences. This article provides technology-based tools that can be utilized for learning Japanese as a second language (JSL). These JSL CALL tools facilitate autonomous and ubiquitous learning that can take place anywhere and anytime. Portals and websites containing useful links for learning Japanese will be listed, as well as apps for mobile devices. The criteria for selecting the resources discussed below were as follows: (a) the popularity of the resource as indicated by the large number of users and/or ratings and reviews, and (b) the authors' own personal use of and experience with them. This list of resources, although by no means exhaustive, reviews the current state of the practice of JSL CALL tools.

Podcasting Websites

Podcasting websites offer multimedia episodes to assist language learning. Table 1 contains a list of both free and fee-based websites that contain Japanese lessons comprised of audio, video, and supplementary tools at various levels, which are accessible through desktop computers and mobile devices. In addition, some of the advantages and disadvantages of each website are listed in Table 1 to give readers a quick, concise idea of the affordances that each resource can provide. This information can be used to guide learners in selecting the tools that fit their personal goals and needs.

Dictionaries

There are several free online Japanese dictionaries with a variety of features such as kanji stroke-order diagrams and animations, verb conjugations, and example sentences. The input method can be kana, kanji, romaji, or English. The following are four examples of online dictionaries that are easy to use for beginners: jisho (http://jisho.org), RomajiDesu (<http://romajidesu.com>), Japanese Learner's Dictionary (http://dictionary.j-cat.org/JtoE/index.php), and Breen's WWWJDIC (http://nihongo.monash. edu/cgi-bin/wwwjdic?1C). Moreover, 日本語コロケーション辞典 (http://collocation.hyogen.info) and Karin (http://japanese-learning.isc.yamaguchi-u. ac.jp/collocation/pc.html) are useful resources for upper-intermediate and advanced learners of Japanese to identify collocational lexical strings and find words that usually occur together.

Other Web-based Resources

Apart from podcasting websites and online dictionaries, there are some other helpful resources available for learning Japanese. JGram (<http://www. jgram.org>) contains a list of the most frequently used Japanese grammar rules, with explanations and sample sentences. NihongoShark (<https:// nihongoshark.com>) is a resource on how to learn Japanese, introducing tips, tools, and free daily lessons. NihongoShark also offers paid courses such as "Toby in Tokyo."

Enjoy Learning Online Japanese (<http://www. ajalt.org/english/online>), created by the Association for Japanese-Language Teaching, allows learners to study a wide variety of materials ranging from elementary grammar lessons to advanced reading comprehension practice.

Table 1. *Podcasting Websites for Learning Japanese*

Websites	Advantages	Disadvantages

JapanesePod101 <http://japanese-pod101.com>
 	
Cost: A limited number of materials available for free
	• Available study tools:
	  1. Audio cast
	  2. Video cast
	  3. PDF lesson notes
	  4. Kana learning suite
	  5. Personal vocabulary database
	  6. Kanji and audio dictionary
	  7. Flashcards
	  8. JLPT preparation course
	  9. Mobile app (iOS & Android)
	• Pronunciation and accent review
	• Community forum and lesson discussion
	• Levels: beginner to advanced
		• Short dialogues (usually less than 1 minute)
		• Not good for intermediate and advanced learners who need more exposure to longer stretches of discourse
		• Overuse of English as the medium of instruction
		• Occasional problems with the mobile app according to user reviews

Nihongonomori (日本語の森) <http://nihongonomori.com> Cost: Free	• Japanese, English, Korean, and Vietnamese as the languages of instruction • JLPT preparation videos from N3 up to N1	• Most videos focus on JLPT preparation and only a few on basic Japanese • Does not include videos for JLPT N5 & N4 • No mobile app

Easy Japanese <http://www.nhk.or.jp/lesson>
 	
Cost: Free
	• Available study tools:
	  1. Audio cast
	  2. PDF lesson notes
	  3. Kana training
	  4. Mobile app (iOS & Android)
	• Audio lessons on basic grammar and useful expressions
	• Offered in 17 languages
		• None noted

Erin's Challenge! <http://erin.ne.jp>
 	
Cost: Free
	• Available study tools:
	  1. Audio cast
	  2. Video cast
	  3. Game-like exercises
	  4. Illustrated vocabulary builder
	• Available in 9 languages
		• No mobile app

E-learning for Japanese (<http://e-nihongo.tsukuba.ac.jp>), supported by the University of Tsukuba, can be used to learn Japanese through three modules: "Learn", "Talk", and "Write", which contain flash-based animations, pictures, and illustrations. Speech recognition technology and a learning community are also part of the E-learning for Japanese system. Finally, Maggie Sensei (<http://maggiesensei.com>) offers enjoyable lessons on topics such as Japanese slang, vocabulary, grammar, as well as Japanese culture.

Internet Browser Add-on Tools

There are also some pop-up Japanese add-on tools, which provide plugin dictionaries for helping JSL learners read kanji characters on their browsers. On a Japanese-language website, these tools enable the learner to better understand the content by just hovering the mouse over the kanji characters to reveal a pop-up bubble of kanji readings and meanings, then the kanji readings and meanings can be seen in a pop-up bubble. Examples of pop-up Japanese dictionaries available for a variety of browsers include Rikaichan (<http://www.polarcloud.com/rikaichan>)—for Firefox, Thunderbird, and Seamonkey; Rikaikun (available on Google Chrome web store)—for Chrome; PeraPera (available from the Firefox Add-ons Manager)—for Firefox; and Safarikai (<https://github.com/ashchan/safarikai>)—for Safari. It is important to remember that these add-on tools might have some bugs which from time to time stop them from functioning effectively.

Mobile Apps
Flashcards

Spaced-repetition flashcard programs are recommended for long-term retention (Toppino & Gerbier, 2014) and one of the better JSL CALL tools offering such a program is Anki (<http://ankisrs.net>), which allows its users to either make their own deck of study cards, and/or study the cards shared by other users on different topics, including Japanese (<https://ankiweb.net/shared/decks/japanese>). Anki is available for free on desktop computers as well as on Android mobile devices.

However, the iOS version AnkiMobile Flashcards is not available for free.

Dictionaries

An array of Japanese dictionary applications have been developed for learners of Japanese, among which, imiwa? has come into wide use. This is a free, multilingual dictionary available on iOS devices. Midori is another iOS dictionary app remarkable for its search suggestions, search by handwriting, and wildcard search. A third dictionary application, Japanese, allows users to create their own vocabulary lists and exchange them with others. The entries of this dictionary are also tagged with JLPT levels where applicable, making this app helpful for those interested in taking the JLPT.

Optical Character Recognition (OCR) Apps

OCR-based dictionary applications that recognize kanji characters in images can be of tremendous help in reading Japanese texts. With the Google Translate app, users are able to translate a text by taking a picture of some text and selecting scanned kanji characters to be translated. It is worth mentioning that Google Translate offers network-supported translations as well as offline, instant translations. Yomiwa is a paid app available on iOS and Android with which Japanese texts can be translated offline in real time. Wakaru is another useful iOS app which features a web browser, an ebook reader, and flashcard builder, all within the app itself.

Kanji and Kana Study Apps

A multitude of mobile apps exist for learning hiragana, katakana, and kanji. These apps incorporate various features such as stroke order practice, readings, and meanings. Examples of these apps include TenguGo Kana, available free of charge on both iOS and Android, and Dr. Moku's hiragana and katakana mnemonics app, which is downloadable from iTunes and Google Play. KanjiPictoGraphix, another iOS app, also relies on pictorial mnemonics to help users practice 600 basic kanji characters. There are also some game apps for learning kanji, such as Kanji Crush (iOS) and Kanji Connect (iOS and Android).

Conclusion

This article presented an overview of CALL resources for studying Japanese as a Second Language. Most of the tools introduced can be used autonomously by learners outside the classroom or incorporated into classroom-based language training. The authors hope that these tech tools will help teachers and learners of Japanese in promoting and facilitating autonomous mastery of the Japanese language.

Reference

Toppino, T. C., & Gerbier, E. (2014). About practice: Repetition, spacing, and abstraction. *The Psychology of Learning and Motivation, 60*, 113-189. doi:10.1016/B978-0-12-800090-8.00004-4

Editor's Note: *The end of the school year has come and many of our readers are already planning for the coming year. Be sure to stay on top of the registrations for the PanSIG 2018 and JALTCALL 2018 conferences coming up in May and June. Both conferences have CALL-related presentations full of excellent ideas to help you keep your classes* Wired! *in 2018! I'll see you there!*