

Long Distance Language Learning: The Second Year of Televised Japanese

The Televised Japanese Language Program (TJaLP), developed at North Carolina State University (NCSSU) in 1984 with a grant from the Japan-United States Friendship Commission, offers a quality Japanese language program at institutions where full-time or part-time Japanese instructors cannot be hired. In its second year of operation (1985–86), TJaLP courses were being offered at ten universities and colleges in five Southeastern states. In this follow-up look at the program, the author discusses the characteristics that make a TJaLP-type course an attractive approach for distant education for any language having small enrollment: low cost, high student participation, and reinforcing feedback.

Media and technology have played an important role in education. Foreign language education is no exception; the extensive use of media started with language laboratories in the middle of the century (Hammerly 1982), and the use of computers in the language curriculum is no longer a new idea.

Videotapes, films, and television have also come into wide-spread use recently. Christen (1983), for instance, regards video programs—with both sound and motion—as an excellent means of demonstrating or explaining concepts.

In addition to visual media prepared specifically for the foreign language classroom as supplemental materials, there are also complete videotape and broadcast television foreign language courses; these are often marketed with

other target language teaching materials (Chaix, 1983).

Developed at North Carolina State University in 1984 with a grant from the Japan-United States Friendship Commission, TJaLP is a “complete foreign language course” suitable for use at institutions that cannot afford to hire full-time or part-time Japanese language instructors.

Unlike other Japanese language programs, TJaLP’s uniqueness offers attractive incentives: 1) it is cost-effective due to low production and maintenance costs; 2) each class encourages immediacy and spontaneity in language generation; 3) classes are highly participatory; 4) TJaLP students receive feedback both from the on-site tutor and the instructor who teaches the videotaped course at NCSU.

The guiding principle behind TJaLP has been the realization that it was not developed so that it could become a permanent fixture in each of the participating institutions; rather, it was conceived as a stepping stone to hiring a regular classroom instructor and “clearing the path” for a viable Japanese language program. Although created specifically for Japanese, the approach of the program can be successfully applied to distant education for any uncommonly taught language with small enrollment.

The Components of TJaLP

In the TJaLP approach, a live, unrehearsed classroom session is videotaped at NCSU; the unedited tape is shipped immediately to partici-

pating institutions. Once the tape has been viewed by a distant audience—hereafter referred to as TJaLP students—it is returned to NCSU where it is recycled by recording a new classroom session on it. The classroom used for the TJaLP class is “covered” by three cameras operated by one operator. Duplication facilities at NCSU are capable of making up to 15 VHS and ten 3/4” sets of original tapes simultaneously.

TJaLP is economical primarily because it bypasses the production costs of a polished video performance. Students participating in TJaLP share a classroom experience and not a televised production; during taping, both students and instructors feel spontaneous and not like actors on stage; there is no urgency to create a permanent, perfect performance product. Students—when viewing the tapes—feel a closeness and accessibility to instructors because the classroom “looks and feels real.”

Not only does the videotape capture classroom dynamics “warts and all,” it also makes possible the use of such tapes for make-up and review.

For TJaLP, every Japanese class at NCSU is videotaped. TJaLP students view the videotaped sessions locally as a group and “participate” in the NCSU class in the following ways:

- 1) doing the practice activities or “drills” developed by the professional NCSU instructors (for many of the exercises, additional visual aids are sent to the participating institutions);
- 2) completing the same homework assignments as those given to NCSU students (all homework assignments are sent to NCSU instructors, graded and returned to the participating institutions immediately);
- 3) taking the same quizzes and exams as those taken by NCSU students (including the final individual oral interview—everything graded by NCSU instructors);
- 4) having access to special “telephone office hours” with NCSU instructors (collect calls enable TJaLP students to discuss linguistic problems with the instructor); and

- 5) participating in campus visits by the NCSU instructor.

The concept around which TJaLP is built was first introduced by Thomas Russell of The School of Textiles at North Carolina State University. The coordinator of Teacher Oriented Televised Education (TOTE) since 1976, Russell originated the idea of using the TOTE system for language teaching. Realizing that the need patterns of Japanese language courses at NCSU and those of textile courses were similar (i.e., few enrollees, dispersed over a wide geographical area), Russell—with the author’s cooperation—conducted a small experiment involving the teaching of Japanese.

Although he concluded that the TOTE system was applicable to foreign language teaching (Russell and Russell, 1983; Russell, 1983), he noted: “It is highly probable that changes from TOTE system are needed that would better accommodate foreign language instruction. These changes might include periodic (monthly) regional meetings of the participants at convenient sites for conversation experiences” (Russell, p. 31).

Before starting TJaLP, the author needed to devise substantial modifications that Russell did not anticipate—modifications that would make TOTE suitable for language learning.

The biggest problem in adapting the TOTE system to TJaLP was that it was almost exclusively designed for lecture courses. As foreign language educators know, depending on lecture alone in language teaching relegates both teacher and learner to the grammar-translation method—long since abandoned by the majority of foreign language teachers. Students must use the language in the classroom context—the so-called “act” dimension of language learning.

Explanations of grammar and the writing system—the so-called “fact” part of language learning—were the only activities we could pursue if we used the TOTE system as it was originally designed to be used. Confronted with the necessity of incorporating active use of the language, followed by correction and reinforcement, we had a choice: if we used TOTE with-

out modification, TJaLP students would sit passively in front of a TV screen; if we modified it so that students were actively involved in language, we needed to incorporate local tutors at all participating institutions.

A local tutor is a native speaker who is present in the classroom during the video viewings and helps students do the activities for the practice sessions according to directions from the NCSU instructor. Instructions for the tutor are provided either on video tape or in the class lesson plans which are sent to the tutor. During the video sessions, the tutor does not stop the tape unless directed to do so, or if students are experiencing extraordinary problems completing their learning tasks.

In addition, the tutor also conducts one hour of drill and practice without the videotape—using materials provided by the NCSU instructor. The tutor also monitors and collects quizzes and exercises, homework and materials that must be sent to NCSU. Since the tutors are not teachers, they are not asked to make up drills, answer grammar or linguistic questions, or in any way “teach” class.

In addition to the tutors, each institution has a local coordinator, a faculty member at the satellite institution who handles all administrative matters outside the TJaLP classroom. Both tutors and coordinators attend an orientation workshop shortly before a TJaLP program begins.

On the average, five hours are spent per textbook lesson in the videotaped NCSU classroom, followed by a reading and writing practice hour. A lesson is completed in two weeks. Of the five hours per lesson, one hour is a grammar/culture explanation session, and the other four hours are drill or practice sessions. TJaLP schools also have an additional two hours of drill and practice per lesson conducted by the tutor without videotape.

The videotaped drill sessions have been the most difficult to design and execute. For the most part, the instructor begins each drill exercise by showing an example and getting the NCSU students to respond so that the responses

would be audible on the videotape. For the rest of the drill, the audio was turned off. With the help and correction by the tutor, TJaLP students followed the “silent” portion of the tape looking at the visual cues shown on the screen or responding to oral cues provided by the tutor. For each drill session, tutors received written paradigms for the drill exercises.

TJaLP has been in operation since August of 1984. During the first year, five institutions in the Carolinas participated in the program. The first year report is published in the *Foreign Language Annals*, Volume 19, No. 6 (Kataoka, 1986), and describes the program, its approach, and its first year.

The Second Year of TJaLP

During the 1985–86 academic year, 52 students studied Elementary Japanese with TJaLP at ten universities and colleges in five Southeastern states. The participating institutions were as follows: The University of North Carolina campuses at Charlotte, Greensboro, and Wilmington; Guilford College, Wake Forest University, East Carolina University, The College of Charlotte, The University of Georgia, The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and The University of Louisville.

Two schools, Guilford College and Wake Forest University, are private; the others are state supported institutions.

Students paid their tuition and fees at their institutions and received grades/credits from them for having taken TJaLP. Each participating school, however, respected the authority of NCSU instructors to assign grades for students participating in TJaLP.

Although some participating institutions covered portions of their local expenses, NCSU received no payment from them for offering the course; almost all the funding necessary for TJaLP came from the grant.

Although course material covered and homework assignments were exactly the same for the second year as for the first, we did revise drill materials, quizzes and exams for the second

year. As was true in the first year, students completed The Modern Language Aptitude Test and questionnaires at the beginning and at the end of the program.

Performance of TJaLP Students

As was true for the first year, no statistically significant differences were found between NCSU students and TJaLP students in terms of major exam scores (midterm, final, and oral exams for each of the fall and spring semesters). It appears that TJaLP students can learn Japanese as well as students enrolled in "regular" classes. In 19 of the 24 quizzes given throughout the academic year, TJaLP students actually scored higher than NCSU students; in seven of these quizzes—five of which tested reading and writing specifically—the differences were statistically significant. (See Table 1 for Comparison of NCSU and TJaLP Students' Test and Quiz Performance).

Do students in TJaLP learn Japanese better than students in regular classes? Although the results could be interpreted to mean "yes," differences in major exam scores and the slightly better performance of TJaLP students (compared to their NCSU counterparts) can best be understood by examining correlations between specific independent variables. In general, exam results correlate strongly with Modern Language Aptitude scores, Grade Point Average (GPA), GPA earned in high school, SAT mathematical scores and SAT total scores (and in the first semester, the number of homework assignments completed, language lab work, and attendance). (See Table 2 for Correlations Between Exam Results and Selected Independent Variables).

Upon further examination, TJaLP students' scores in all variables—except SAT total scores—are higher than those earned by the NCSU students (statistically significant differences between the two groups were observed only in the category of home assignments during fall semester). (See Table 3 for Comparison of NCSU and TJaLP Students' Backgrounds).

Other variables—reasons for studying Japanese, plans to visit Japan, previous study in Jap-

anese, prior living in Japan, desired level of proficiency, and age—could also account for the differences between the two groups; no significant differences were observed in these variables between the two groups. The only significant difference observed in the background composition of the two groups was in distribution of majors; more NCSU students represented engineering and natural sciences than the TJaLP group. The TJaLP group, on the other hand, had a larger ratio of humanities and social science majors. This difference in majors, however, did not show any relationship to performance when tested by analysis of variance.

Attrition Rate

One of the major concerns of distance education is attrition rate. As was true for the first year, the second year posed no statistically significant differences between NCSU and TJaLP groups in terms of intention to continue language study during spring semester, the actual number who continued language study, or the number who indicated they would continue the second year if TJaLP were available.

Student Course Evaluations

After the fall semester final exam, forty students filled out a five-page questionnaire comparable to the one of the first year. As was true the first year, students regarded TJaLP very favorably. To the question of whether they felt they had learned some Japanese, and if the course had been worth taking, 38 students answered "yes." (There were no "no" answers). About half of the students (18 of them) believed they would have learned more had the course been taught by an on-site teacher; however, seventeen students disagreed, and five gave no response. Those who felt the course would have been better with an on-site teacher gave the following criticisms of TJaLP in order of frequency: 1) students cannot ask questions immediately of the instructor; 2) videotapes are not always visually and aurally clear; and 3) there is

no direct, face-to-face individual interaction with the instructor.

In contrast to other self-instructional language programs, TJaLP was purposely designed to provide students with constant structure and feedback. Unlike other self-instructional programs which leave learning pace up to the student and usually require only one examination at the end of the academic year (Borei, 1982), TJaLP provided quizzes and home assignments throughout the semester, well-planned drill sessions (with videotape and without), and detailed semester schedule sheets for students.

Thirty-three students felt that the incorporated homework assignments and quizzes served as the framework for TJaLP structured study.

Students were also asked to evaluate the three forms of TJaLP participation: videotaped lectures by the NCSU instructor, drill sessions with the videotape, and drill sessions by the tutor without videotape. The majority of respondents indicated that the videotaped lectures and drills were helpful (37 and 34 respectively). Critiques of the drill sessions also revealed, however, that the pace of the class depended upon NCSU class size and ability; a few TJaLP students complained that the taped drill sessions had either too much or too little actual practice time for each drill item, i.e., NCSU students were either too slow or too fast, depending upon the abilities of the students at the satellite institutions. Thus, students at institutions having very small classes, composed of talented, successful students felt they were made to practice material they had already mastered. This is a weakness of TJaLP that may defy solution short of changing its format completely.

Future Modifications of TJaLP

The problem of actual practice time during the videotaped sessions raises the issue of the tutor's role. If tutors were allowed to conduct all drills, and the use of videotapes were limited to language structure, cultural aspects, and the writing system, we could partly solve the problem of pace.

There are, however, two important considerations that argue against such changes.

First, it would take more time and effort on the part of the NCSU instructors who are already devoting much time to TJaLP. For each tutor-led drill session (once a week), an instructor at NCSU must write—on the average—a six-page lesson plan with very detailed instructions as opposed to a one-page summary for the videotaped drills.

Tutor-led drill sessions also require more realia for the local TJaLP classroom as opposed to one, "shared" set of realia on the videotape. Since the cost of materials and shipping are already quite high for the once-a-week drills, additional costs of providing each location with realia could raise our expenses in this category by a factor of five.

Secondly, if tutors lead all drills, tutors must spend more time preparing for class. Currently, tutors spend about ten minutes prior to each videotaped drill session reading the summary in order to become familiar with the content. In contrast, tutors would have to spend an hour studying directions and getting visual aids prepared for each non-video drill session. If they had to spend two or three additional hours per week for course preparation, their honorarium would have to increase by about 50%—an item that would raise program costs considerably.

It could be argued that TJaLP could hire trained tutors who can make their own drills so that NCSU instructors would not have to spend more time on this task. This option is not really an option; it is difficult to find untrained—let alone trained—individuals in this area who know Japanese. Because of cost and time constraints, training tutors is not a solution either.

It is the goal of TJaLP to provide a *quality* program at *minimal* cost. The policies in effect are designed to achieve this goal.

The View from Behind the Scene

Students' performance and evaluations of the second year of TJaLP indicate that the program

has been quite successful in its immediate goal of reaching a geographically dispersed audience and reaching it effectively and economically. The problem of time differentials between the NCSU classroom and the satellite classrooms in videotaped drills has not been solved; the only apparent solutions would increase program costs substantially. If the program costs much more, its value would decrease considerably.

Since the level of TJaLP students' performance is not lower than that of NCSU students, and since the majority of students do not seem bothered by the time differential problem, the author's inclination is to continue the program without changes in the videotaped drills and the tutors' roles. At some point—given more funding—we may be able to experiment with reduced videotaped drills and increased tutor responsibilities, accompanied by more training.

The long-term goal of TJaLP is to act as a transition program that can serve to encourage each participating institution to hire its own Japanese language instructor for an independent program. Two of the ten institutions in the 1985–86 TJaLP group have already hired their own instructors to teach Japanese during 1986–

87; two other institutions are considering doing the same for the 1987–88 academic year.

Faculty who commit themselves to initiating and administering this type of program will find themselves working twice as hard as in the "normal" teaching-research academic environment.

My own survival of the "TJaLP" experience is due in large measure to the combined help and support of my colleague, Hiroko Goto, and my student assistants, Julie Bulkley and Joy Whanggo.

The satisfaction I have received from this program has outweighed the effort invested. When students tell me how much they were enjoying TJaLP, how thankful they were that the program had made it possible for them to begin learning Japanese, how the individual attention in TJaLP had made it their favorite course, I know the program has made a difference.

For the foreign language teacher who is interested in developing a TJaLP-type program like the one at NCSU, I can say with confidence: the personal and professional benefits are considerable.

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TABLE 1
Comparison of NCSU and TJaLP Students' Test & Quiz Performance Academic Year 1985-86

	NCSU x	N	TJaLP x	N
Examinations				
Midterm (Fall) {100 pts}	83.13	44	86.02	46
Final Exam (Fall) {100 pts}	69.86	44	71.78	43
Oral Interview (Fall) {15 pts}	11.59	43	11.56	44
Midterm (Spring) {100 pts}	70.94	26	78.02	30
Final Exam (Spring) {100 pts}	70.58	21	67.72	29
Oral Interview (Spring) {100 pts}	11.08	21	11.45	27
Quizzes				
BJ Intro Lesson Quiz {10 pts}	8.52	43	8.51	48
BJ Lesson 1 Quiz {10 pts}	8.75	44	8.99	48
BJ Lesson 2 Quiz {10 pts} *	7.93	44	8.53	46
BJ Lesson 3 Quiz {10 pts}	8.18	43	8.05	43
BJ Lesson 4 Quiz {10 pts}	8.37	38	8.52	47
BJ Lesson 5 Quiz {10 pts}	7.49	42	7.62	43
BJ Lesson 6 Quiz {10 pts} *	5.83	42	6.91	41
BJ Lesson 7 Quiz {10 pts}	7.10	24	7.75	33
BJ Lesson 8 Quiz {10 pts}	7.62	26	7.85	28
BJ Lesson 9 Quiz {10 pts}	7.89	25	8.08	30
BJ Lesson 10 Quiz {10 pt}	7.63	24	7.46	28
BJ Lesson 11 Quiz {10 pt}	8.08	23	8.41	29
BJ Lesson 12 Quiz {10 pt}	8.10	22	8.27	29
Katakana Quiz 1 {10 pts}	9.05	41	8.92	47
Katakana Quiz 2 {10 pts}	8.44	42	8.83	39
Katakana Quiz 3 {10 pts} *	8.51	39	9.20	43
Katakana Quiz 4 {10 pts}	8.04	38	8.77	40
Katakana Quiz 5 {10 pts}	8.07	41	7.82	40
Hiragana Quiz 1 {10 pts} *	7.69	26	8.68	32
Hiragana Quiz 2 {10 pts}	7.60	25	8.36	31
Hiragana Quiz 3 {10 pts} *	7.44	24	8.45	29
Hiragana Quiz 4 {10 pts} *	8.08	24	9.01	28
Hiragana Quiz 5 {10 pts} *	6.94	23	8.04	28
Hiragana Quiz 6 {10 pts}	7.80	22	8.36	29

*Statistically significant differences at $p < .05$ observed using T-test.

TABLE 2
Correlations Between Exam Results and Selected Variables

Variable	MT1	FN1	OR1	MT2	FN2	OR2
GPA Earned in College	.52*	.33*	.35*	.48*	.55*	.33*
GPA Earned in High School	.45*	.41*	.35*	.43*	.29	.05
SAT (Verb. & Math Combined)	.35*	.35*	.29*	.31	.51*	.37*
Mod. Language Aptitude Test	.45*	.54*	.45*	.52*	.51*	.49*
Homework Completed (Fall)	.42*	.44*	.32*	—	—	—
Language Lab Homework Completed (Fall)	.35*	.42*	.32*	—	—	—
Class Attendance (Fall)	.22*	.26*	.23*	—	—	—
Homework Completed (Spring)	—	—	—	.40*	.13	.14
Language Lab Homework Completed (Spring)	—	—	—	.37*	.15	.02
Class Attendance (Spring)	—	—	—	.28*	.01	.04

*These figures are statistically significant at $p < .05$.

TABLE 3
Comparison of NCSU and TJaLP Students' Backgrounds

Item	NCSU		TJaLP	
	x	N	x	N
Age	22.90	44	25.20	43
GPA Earned in College (A = 4)	2.86	31	3.11	28
GPA Earned in High School (A = 4)	3.38	28	3.49	27
SAT Total	1166.10	25	1151.40	22
SAT Verbal	581.20	23	563.00	21
SAT Mathematical	292.80	23	600.00	21
Goal of Japanese Study (Speaking)	34.90	43	37.60	44
Goal of Japanese Study (Reading)	33.70	43	30.10	44
Goal of Japanese Study (Writing)	31.40	42	28.00	41
Modern Language Aptitude (MLAT Test)	117.10	40	122.50	46
MLAT Test (native English speakers)	120.40	31	123.10	42
Homework Completed (Fall)*	11.80	44	13.90	49
Language Lab Homework (Completed) (Fall)	4.20	44	4.50	41
Class Attendance (%) (Fall)	88.50	44	92.20	38
Homework Completed (Spring)	12.80	26	15.00	29
Language Lab Homework (Completed) (Spring)	3.60	26	4.40	29
Class Attendance (%) (Spring)	82.70	26	91.20	29

*Statistically significant difference at $p < .05$ observed using T-test.