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A Hybrid Course for Introductory Chinese Lectures at Kyoto University

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This study comprised the creation of a hybrid course for introductory Chinese at Kyoto University. The course consists of two classes, one for grammar and one for practice, for which we have developed a textbook and multimedia online teaching materials. Last year, we introduced self-introduction exercises to the curriculum because we thought there was a lack of speaking practice in class. The researchers and course teachers had students record self-introduction videos in Japanese and exchange them with students at Chinese universities. Students also practiced adding subtitles to the videos. Post-semester surveys administered to students show that both Japanese and Chinese students are keen to continue study of each other's languages and countries. The researchers and the teachers believe that video collaboration boosts students' motivation not only for this task but also for learning language as a whole. Implications for future language learning in China and Japan are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The team of teachers in charge of Chinese language classes and the Academic Centers for Computing and Media Studies at Kyoto University are in the process of developing Chinese language textbooks and corresponding multimedia teaching materials for use in first-year undergraduate courses in the computer-assisted language learning (CALL) classes. This year 13 courses will be offered during the first and second semester. These courses include both grammar lessons and hands-on practice-based lessons. The grammar lessons are conducted in ordinary classrooms, while the practice-based lessons take place in CALL classrooms. Students who take the practice-based lessons buy textbooks, but also use the multimedia materials already installed on the CALL classroom computers. A Chinese language teacher typically conducts the lessons with the support of a Chinese-speaking teaching assistant. A web site is also available, making it possible for students to study outside class hours, while giving them as many opportunities as possible to come into contact with the target language.

One of the newest installations involves the use of subtitles for video composition in the Chinese classes. There is much literature on the use of subtitles in language learning (Baltova, 1994; Brett,

1997; Chang 2007; Guillory, 1998; Martin, 2009; Uematsu, 2004) and comparisons of the effects of using L1 and L2 subtitles in learning a target language (Chia-jung, 2009; Kachen, 1996; Markham et al, 2001; Baltova ,1999). Yoshino (2003) observed that when subtitles are displayed in advance, the recall rate of vocabulary and content is significantly higher than when subtitles are displayed with the L1 production. Yoshino concluded that the extent of advancement is determined by the average time of non-speech segments. Though research on the best way to utilize subtitles is still under investigation, researchers can say that selecting the appropriate subtitles according to the situation of use can have positive effects on the learning process.

Though it may be difficult for students to use this subtitle function on commercial videos, it can be a relatively easier task when used with videos recorded in a classroom. For example, the open-source software GOM player enables a user to select subtitles or show/hide specific subtitles easily. A simple editing interface provided by the player provides accessibility to students, while other commercial products require technical knowledge to utilize the subtitle functions. For these reasons, the researchers of this study decided to use the GOM player with students in their creation of class videos using the subtitle function.

CLASS ACTIVITY

The following section outlines how the activity was created and the steps students took to complete the activity.

Creation of the task

After discussing with the teacher in charge, the researchers estimated that it would be too difficult for students to write sentences of self-instruction in the first class of the second semester. As for the template's structure, considering that merely filling in the template would be too easy and perhaps boring, the researchers made it so that the students could create sentences of their own. An example using a template for where students were asked to write a sentence using one particular expression (tingshuō) is included in Appendix A.

Sample video data

In order to help the students have a general idea of what was expected for the completed task and understand how to proceed with the activity, the authors asked the Chinese-language teacher and Chinese-speaking TA to make a video data sample. The sample script and a screenshot of sample video (see Figure 1) are shown below.

Script sample: 大家好，我姓×，叫×××。我是京都大学文学部二年级的学生，是中国江苏人。我非常不喜欢运动，比较喜欢在家看书，听音乐。我听说日本的北海道特别漂亮，一钱谏直想去北海道看看。请多多关照，谢谢！



Figure 1. Self-introduction video created by native speaker of Chinese are shown for sample.

Completing the activity.

At the beginning of the class, the teacher and the assistant explained the purpose and the schedule of the class. The following table (Table 1) provides the schedule students followed to complete the activity.

Table 1. Time allocated per activity

Activity	Time allocation
Activity Explanation	10 minutes
Making script	20 minutes (5-minute explanation)
Typing	20 minutes (5-minute explanation)
Recording video	20 minutes (5-minute explanation)
Subtitling	15 minute (5-minute explanation)
Submitting videos	5 minutes

The researchers also informed the students that some of the videos would be shown in front of the class and that some videos might be exchanged with a university in China. Then, researchers showed a video sample (described above and shown in Figure 1).

Students were then asked to prepare their own scripts (using the example as a template) using pen and paper. Unlike Georgiou et al.'s (2009) study on learners studying English in which researchers did not have to instruct the English alphabet, the teachers in this study had to explain the Chinese characters.

There are some Japanese Chinese characters, which have no corresponding Chinese characters (Kokuji). The Chinese language in China uses simplified Chinese characters, so the representation is a little different from the Japanese one. For this reason, the characters were explicitly instructed.

Because this activity was the first time for students to type in Chinese, the researchers also had to provide detailed instructions. Students were taught to use *pinyin*, the official system for transcribing Chinese characters used in teaching Mandarin Chinese. There were some students who easily acquired the way of typing pinyin but could not type well because they did not have enough knowledge of the correspondence between pinyin and the Chinese characters. (There seemed to be many students who feel the importance of memorizing the correspondence between Chinese and pinyin characters.)

Another part of the activity involved recording a video. This recording process took place in a computer classroom. In the CALL classrooms each computer has two microphones: one microphone on each CCD camera and another on each headset (see Figure 2 for a glimpse of the setup). Before recording, students had to confirm that the headset microphone worked. Some students had problems confirming the settings, because that was - for almost all of them - their first experience using the equipment in the lab. In some cases, voices from the neighboring seats were recorded, too. Sometimes, the researchers had to caution the students who talked too loudly.

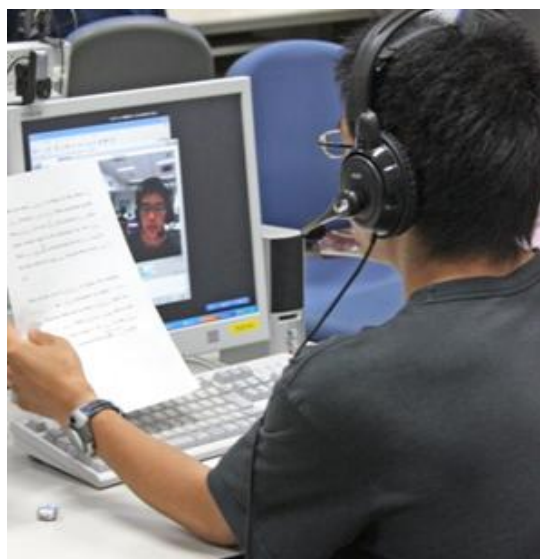


Figure 2. Snapshot of student recording with camera and headset in CALL classroom

Another activity involved in the project made use of subtitling. Subtitle text is automatically read by the GOM player and displays as a subtitle when playing in a movie file. (The process students used to making the subtitle text is shown in Figure 3.) After the students recorded videos by themselves, they created the subtitles for the videos. The teacher distributed a subtitle text sample and students were asked to create their own subtitle data by replacing the text with their own and editing the time code accordingly. Texts used as samples are provided below.

Sample 1: 大家好!我姓××, 我叫××××. 我是京都大学法学部一年级的学生, 是奈良人. 喜欢听音乐. 听说京都都有很多有名的古建筑, 今年我想去看这些. 请多多关照, 谢谢.

Sample 2: 大家好. 我叫×××. 我是京都大学经济学部三年级的学生, 是京都人. 我喜欢打棒球, 游泳, 看电影. 现在我几乎每天都打棒球. 听说四川菜很辣, 但是很好吃. 所以有时间我想去中国尝尝四川菜. 请多多关照.

Subtitle creation also involved editing the time-code for those videos and watching their videos several times to make sure the audio and the subtitles were synchronized. This repeated watching provided a chance for students to review their speaking more objectively.

Making subtitle files

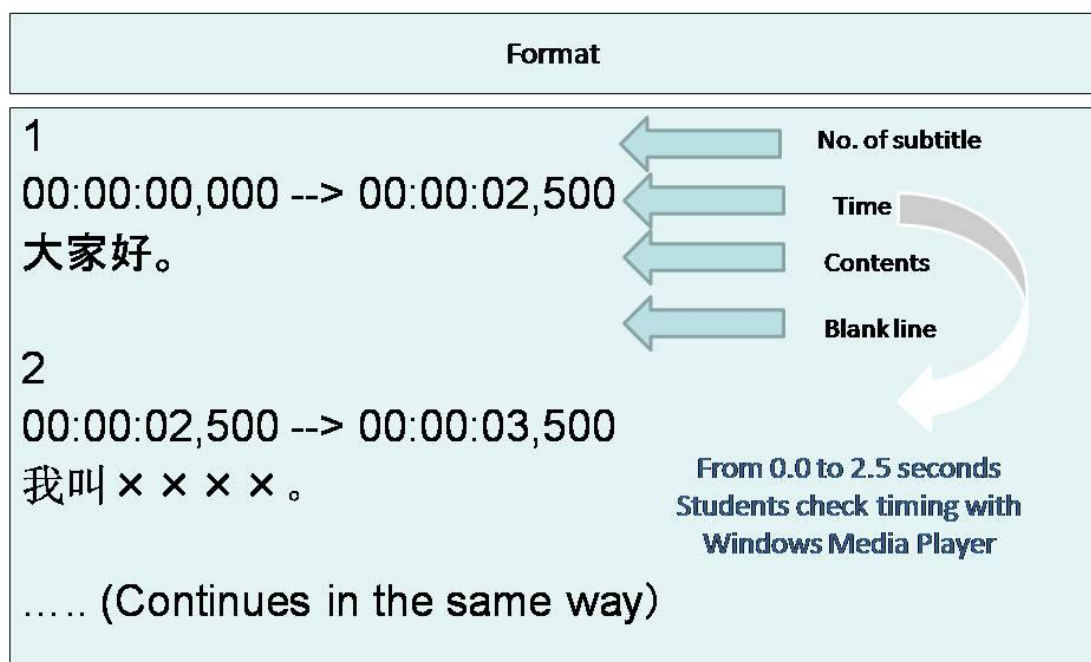


Figure 3. Process by which subtitle files were made

A video exchange was the final component of this project. For more effective use of self-introduction videos, the researchers exchanged them with some Chinese students at Qinghua University in Beijing, who major in Japanese. Because there were only 17 participating Chinese students, much fewer than the nearly 500 Japanese students, the researchers had to select only some of the Japanese students to participate in the video exchange. The following are samples of self-introduction video comments made by students in Qinghua University.

Sample 1. 大家好！我叫××，是清华大学二年级的学生。来自江西省南昌市。我喜欢看日剧、漫画，也喜欢听歌。最喜欢的漫画是火影忍者。我也喜欢吃自己做的饭菜。如果有机会去日本的话，也很想学做日本菜。谢谢！

Sample 2. 大家好！我叫×××。是清华大学日语系，二年级的学生。喜欢踢足球，唱歌，跳舞。听说日本的秋叶原是电子产品的商业区。相去秋叶原买数码相机。请多多关照！

Japanese students made comments on Chinese students' Japanese self-introduction videos using 15 iPhones to record the videos. They recorded the videos in groups of 2-3 and made comments together. The researchers showed the video on the screen and they recorded their comments in pairs. Figure 4 shows the Chinese learners recording their comments for the self-introduction videos using iPod nano.



Figure 4. Recording comments for self-introduction video files by Chinese students in pair-work

RESULTS

Student performance in this task was higher than anticipated. Though this activity requires relatively high computer skills, students managed to type Chinese and record a video for the first time, thanks to the help of the teachers, teaching assistants and support staff. The teachers and the researchers finished this activity within the time expected except for a few cases. The following section provides reflections from both learners and teachers regarding the designed activity.

Student and teacher reflection on pronunciation

The authors believe this activity, in which students recorded themselves and edited the subtitles in the video files, gave students a great opportunity to review their own speaking performance and notice their weak points in Chinese pronunciation.

Giving general comments (feedback) to the class as a whole and to the individual was essential to enable the students to review their pronunciation by themselves. The researchers asked the Chinese teachers and teaching assistants to evaluate students' speech on a scale from zero to three. For some speech data the researchers also asked for a more detailed evaluation. The following tables (2 and 3) include observations from students, responses from involved teachers and an evaluation of the students' pronunciation (used also for further evaluation of the class).

Table 2. Pronunciation errors common to Japanese students

Wrong pronunciation of 「我」「家」
Distinction between 「姓」「是」
Distinction between 「吃」 and 「去」
Wrong pronunciation of 「多」
3 rd tone plus 2 nd tone e.g. 「喜欢」「旅游」
「学部」 is a Japanese way of saying, 「系」 is more Chinese like.
Distinction between 「an」 and 「ang」. 「年」「娘」

Table 3. Pronunciation evaluation examples for each student

Student	Mark	Evaluation
No.1	3	Not so good at tones. You sometimes use a 4 th tone for an inappropriate word.
No.2	3	Pronunciation is very clear. If you focus on tone, it sounds better. Be careful of the pronunciation of 「年 nián」.
No.3	2	「请 qǐng 多多关照」. Practice tones harder.
No.4	3	Practice both pronunciation and tones.
No.5	3	Open your mouth wider to make your pronunciation clearer.

Note: 1 = very good, 2 = good, 3 = normal

Student feedback

From the viewpoint of both confidence and motivation, this activity can be regarded as successful. At the beginning of the class students recorded themselves in a low, timid voice. However, by the end of the class the volume of their voice became louder and more confident. The students asked the teaching assistants and the teacher questions more actively and they answered enthusiastically.

A questionnaire about learner satisfaction and motivation was distributed to both Japanese students and Chinese students. Overall the students remarked they were satisfied with the activity and excited to exchange video files. The activity sparked student motivation to learn the language further and more deeply.

The questionnaire prompted students to “feel free to write anything, i.e. how was the activity today and what do you want to do from now on with the language.” One reply from a Japanese student was, “I have come to think that I should study harder to speak Chinese because it is so interesting.” One comment from a Chinese student was, “The exercise today was fantastic. I am motivated by listening to Japanese students’ Chinese and sharing the experience of studying together. I want to communicate with Japanese students in Qinghua University.” Both statements reveal that this activity made students more eager to learn the language. (Additional questionnaire results from both Japanese and Chinese students are shown in Appendix B.)

Teacher feedback

Teachers and researchers also observed that some students paid more attention to the pronunciation from the viewpoint of communication. One teacher made the following comment: “At the beginning of the class, we watched the video files several times. Every student seemed keen to watch them, producing a good atmosphere. After this, students gradually paid more attention to their pronunciation.”

The activity also changed the relationship between the teacher and students. After the study, the researchers received an email from a teacher who felt that she became closer to her students through this exercise.

DISCUSSION

In a similar activity by Hiraoka (2009), students received better grades in the end-of-semester examination than anticipated by the teacher. Though Hiraoka’s study was not directly related to speaking tasks, the researchers of this study think visual, aural, spoken and written language involvement lowers the barriers students experience in interpreting the sounds of Chinese pronunciation and speaking in Chinese.

The researchers consider the overall activity a success, especially with regards to students’ production of subtitles. Even though it was the first time students created subtitles, they were able to understand the content of the native speakers’ videos, which was remarkably fast and contained many unknown words to the L2 learners. Because they used the same template, the subtitles also aided listening comprehension. Yet watching non-native speaker videos was sometimes difficult for native speakers. The researchers had some trouble with the computers and were unable to show subtitled videos in some cases. One Chinese student remarked, “I cannot understand the content,” when unable to see the subtitles. The teacher then explained the content and students understood it. Another student said, “They said something strange,” which implies that she misunderstood the content. With the teachers’ help, the students clarified their

misunderstanding. These examples also show that while the subtitle activity shows efficacy, there are still some issues to be resolved. The researchers would like to conduct further research on these subtitle functions to improve the task. The authors would also like to analyze the relation between error analysis and holistic evaluation and try out automatic speech evaluation in future studies.

Now, let us consider the effect of creating self-introduction videos in class. Since students were informed in advance that the videos may be played in class, they were likely more careful about errors in pronunciation and grammar. Well-designed activities with the support of teachers and teaching assistants will hopefully allow students to engage in the class with a more positive attitude, while they are assisted in acquiring new vocabulary, expressions and accurate pronunciation in the process.

Though the performance of students was rather higher than expected, the authors still think the amount of time for speaking practice, which is also an important aspect of practical lessons, was not sufficient in this course. As the main focus in class focused on listening activities, there was not enough time to devote to speaking in Chinese, especially on the expression of students' own ideas and thoughts in the normal class time. The researchers and the teachers of the course also think it is too difficult for students to speak Chinese spontaneously. For that reason, the researchers prepared a template which helped the learners to easily introduce themselves by filling in the gaps with their own information, then build in the previously-learned grammatical points so that the lesson corresponded to the other course lessons.

Still, there are many valuable implications for this activity. Though this activity was aimed at having students practice spoken Chinese, the authors think it may have potential implications for practicing other linguistic skills such as listening and writing, too. For example, the researchers prepared a template for students to use when completing this activity. The template could have included more material taught in the first semester, so that the lesson could help the students review. Also, because the template was designed after discussing with each teacher the needs of their students, the templates could be adaptable to fit the requirements of a certain class, language skill or grammar point.

The activity could also be used to practice grammar. When showing a sample video as a model to the students, the teachers played the video sentence by sentence. At some point the teacher asked a student to translate, and at other times he gave grammatical explanations and explained how to introduce one's birthplace. In this way, students could review their grammatical knowledge *and* practice listening.

The activity also was able to focus students' attention on writing. In writing script, the teachers cautioned students about the difference between actual Chinese characters and Japanese Chinese characters. These differences were predicted to pose a problem for the students, especially when trying to explain their own names and the prefectures they came from. Contrary to that expectation, the students easily wrote their names, since their names are called out in Chinese in that class. Regarding the names of the prefectures they were from as well as any toponyms or other words unique to Japanese, the teacher and teaching assistants were able to elaborate on request. The researchers think this enhanced the knowledge of the difference between two Chinese characters.

One complication, however, did arise regarding writing. On the Windows computers in our CALL classrooms, all text files are associated with the Notepad application, which unfortunately is not compatible with Chinese characters. Thus, the script sample did not display properly with some characters being replaced with “■”. The researchers instructed students to use a different application, Hidemaru, which is UTF compatible. Some students could not easily follow this last-minute adaptation to a different application, probably because it requires specialized knowledge of computers. It was recognized by the researchers and teachers that it is difficult to do this kind of activity in such a short amount of time. The researchers believe further practice using the applications could solve this problem.

CONCLUSION

The researchers and the teachers conducted an effective speaking activity that was quite enjoyable for students thanks to the teachers who willingly joined in this activity. It is often the case that teachers cannot spare the time to give some feedback to each student individually. By designing a class activity that included an exchange of videos with a foreign country, the teachers and the researchers made sure that it provided broader benefits. To enjoy these benefits, the students should be able to speak three or four sentences in their L2 consecutively, which is necessary for basic communication. If they are able to produce more than three to four sentences, the students are presumed to be capable of speaking directly to native speakers of the L2, and which may produce enhanced learning results. If they are unable to produce the three to four sentences, native speakers would hardly be able to communicate with the students, possibly resulting in a bad experience for both parties. At the same time, the more this kind of activity is practiced, the more learners' speech data is accumulated. Eventually, this database will be a valuable asset towards developing automatic synchronization of subtitles and speech data, and automatic speech evaluation.

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APPENDIX A

Template for self-introduction (English Translation)

Let's create self-introduction videos

Reviewing grammars in Spring semester

Make self-introduction videos with the following template.

1. 大家好
2. 我姓xx, 叫xxxx.
3. 我是京都大学 (a) 部 (b) 年级的学生, 是 (c) 人.
4. 我喜欢 (d) .
5. 听说 (e) ,我想/要 / 打算 (f) .
6. 请多多关照.

English translation

1. "Hello, everyone.
2. My family name is ____, and full name is ____.
3. I am a ____ year students and belong to faculty of _____. I am from _____.
4. I like _____.
5. As I heard that _____, I'd like to _____
6. Nice to meet you. "

Candidates for the blank

(a) 文学·教育学·法学·经济学·综合间学 · 理学·农学·工学·医学·药学

(b) 一·二·三·四.....

(c) 京都·大阪·神户·奈良·滋贺·和歌山·三重

(If you don't know pronunciation, consult a dictionary or ask a teaching assistant or a teacher.)

(d) 動詞+目的語 (Verb plus Objectives)

打 棒球 / 网球 / 乒乓球 / 排球 /

踢 足球 / , 爬山, 游泳 / 看书 / 电影 / 电视, 听 音乐, 拉 小提琴 / 弹 钢琴 / 吹 长笛 /, 画 画
儿, 做 菜, 玩 游戏 / 电脑 / 乐器,

名詞, 旅游, 书法

(e) (f)

When 听说(tīngshuō) is put before the sentence, the meaning is "I heard that".

The following is an example. Create your own script of self-introduction.

听说中国菜很好吃,我很想吃中国菜.

听说这个电影很好看,我要去看看.

听说上海很漂亮,明年我打算去看看.

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire responses from Japanese and Chinese students

Questionnaire results from the Japanese students.

Comment 1: I improved my Chinese comprehension ability.

Comment 2: It was interesting. Their Japanese is so good, and I noticed my Japanese is not so good.

Comment 3: I come to think that I should study harder to speak Chinese because it is so interesting.

Comment 4: I think that I should study harder in order to speak Chinese better.

Questionnaire results from the Chinese students.

Comment 1: This exercise was useful for my language learning. I want to find out more about the life of university students in Japan and how they learn languages.

Comment 2: I enjoyed communicating with Japanese students through watching videos. It was really fun. Thank you very much. It would be great fun, if I could talk via the internet.

Comment 3: The exercise today was fantastic. I am motivated by listening to Japanese students' Chinese and sharing the experience of studying together. I want to communicate with Japanese students in Qinghua University.

Comment 4: Today's exercise was interesting. By watching videos of Kyoto University students, I understood their thoughts and interests. I was a little bit nervous when I recorded the video. I am happy to communicate with Japanese students of the same age.