



NOTAT FRA PROGRAMSTYRE KNYTTET TIL
PROGRAMSENSORRAPPORT I **JAP252** , SAMT
PROGRAMSENSORRAPPORT I **JAPANESE SCRIPT TEACHING**
FOR VÅREN 2018

Dato for håndtering i programstyret:

24.oktober 2018

Kommentarer fra programstyret til rapportene om JAP252 og Japanese Script Teaching:

Programstyret har diskutert programsensorrapportene for våren 2018, og mener de tegner et riktig bilde av emnet JAP252 og «Japanese Script Teaching» på japanskfaget.

Programstyret er enig i anbefalingene gitt av programsensor, og har ellers ingen spesielle merknader til rapportene.

Fagkoordinator: Benedicte Mosby Irgens

Dato: 06.november 2018

REPORT FROM PROGRAMSENSOR

Sachiko Shin Halley

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Department of Foreign Languages

Faculty of Humanities

For the period 2017-2018

REPORT 8: JAP252 (vår 2018)

This is a report on JAP 252, *Bachelor oppgåve i japansk*, the course offered to students of the Bachelor program of Japanese language.

JAP252 is a course for Bachelor thesis writing. Coming back from their two semester long exchange studies at the universities in Japan, the third year students participate in the course which starts in week 10, and write their Bachelor theses. On completion of this course, the students have also completed their studies for the Bachelor program.

The course contents and teaching

JAP 252 is a 10 week long course, and consists of lectures, individual guidance on thesis writing, and students' presentations.

Before the students begin their exchange studies in Japan, they are instructed by the teacher to find themes for theses during their stay in Japan. The students find their themes based on what they learned from classes at Japanese universities, or from experiences while living in Japan. Some students already focus on what they wish to study in Japan before leaving, and prepare for it.

The students find various themes. Many students choose their themes from contemporary and historical social or political issues, or cultural phenomena which interested them through their studies or experiences in Japan. Fewer students choose the Japanese language for their theme. The theme chosen by each student is assessed by the teacher. The teacher may recommend a change to some other theme if in the teacher's opinion it is impractical to write a thesis on the theme chosen. The students write about the theme they have chosen, or changed to, under the supervision of the teacher. They get guidance about the basic procedure of thesis writing, including stating why the theme has been chosen, what is discussed in the thesis, and documenting sources.

In the pensum list, *Vinduer mot Japan*, is suggested as reference. This is a good introductory text on Japanese language and culture written by several authors, most of whom are academics in Norway. The students also make use of other books and websites related to their own themes.

Following this course, each student writes a thesis, of 10-15 pages, which includes a short summary in the Japanese language.

Evaluation and achievement of the Bachelor Program

Theses submitted by the deadline are evaluated. Grading is by the characters A-F, of which F is fail. Completion of the course gives 10 study points.

According to the teacher, the quality and the level of the theses vary, but very few are evaluated to be F. Some students who did not get very good grades for the earlier courses get good grades for their theses, and vice versa. Some students drop out in their earlier semesters of the Bachelor Program, but students who have completed their exchange studies in Japan rarely drop out afterwards. Every semester before the exchange period, there is usually a student or two who receives an F grade and cannot move forward to the next level. This is a relatively low dropout rate, considering that around half of the first year students drop out by their first or second semester at some other universities' Bachelor Programmes in Japanese language and Japanese studies. It is remarkable that so large a percentage of students achieve the intensive Japanese language learning goals of this Programme.

Comments

The thesis is the final achievement of the students' studies. It is, on the other hand, a task which is different from their other studies in the Bachelor Program, involving analysis and theoretical treatments of issues. Students learn some introductory Japanese history, culture and society in the JAP100 course, but the emphasis is firmly on learning Japanese language up to the intermediate level before beginning their exchange studies in Japan. Students further learn the Japanese language and some other Japan-related subjects, or "Japan Studies", at the universities in Japan. Most students however choose their themes from the fields of "Japan Studies". This might be argued to risk some students writing on themes with limited theoretical knowledge, and the theses thus lacking in depth of discussion.

However, in fact this approach is a principal strength of the course, and a strong advantage for the students. It means that they write their theses building on what they learned at Japanese universities, and/or experiences of living in Japanese society, 'unfiltered' through a preconceived framework.

It is not a good, though it is a frequent, approach for students in Europe and North America to study Japanese culture and society through a prior framework of Western theories, acquired before they personally experience Japan. Many Bachelor-level programs in the Japanese language include teaching "Japan Studies" courses consisting of rather detailed theoretical analyses of the society and

culture, to students who have not yet visited the country. There is a risk in this method that students may acquire artificial theoretical frameworks before going to Japan, and/or before conversing with Japanese people for themselves; and cannot escape from looking at Japan through these theories.

These theories not infrequently appear to the Japanese themselves to be odd, even silly - projections of, and really about, western preoccupations/prejudices/narratives of various kinds rather than the product of a real understanding. We, Japanese, often mention it to each other when we encounter it. At best, much may have to be 'unlearned'. At worst, students may come consistently to misunderstand Japan and the Japanese - the opposite of what is, or should be, an important benefit of learning the Japanese language.

It is therefore a strength that the Bachelor Program in Japanese at the University of Bergen dedicates most teaching hours to advancing the students' Japanese language ability to the highest level practicable; then sends them to Japan; and only after that requires analysis, in the thesis section of the degree. Their Japanese language ability significantly enhances the direct experience of Japanese culture and society they gain from living there. This places them in a much better position to begin to analyse it for themselves, and an important 'reality check' on the validity of theoretical treatments they may at that time, or later, encounter.

It is not necessary for students to produce theses of high theoretic complexity. What is important at Bachelor's level is to learn the techniques of writing academic papers and of sound analysis, including avoiding over-interpretation. Presentations by four students in a class of the JAP252 course which I attended all appeared to have grasped the basic techniques of effective academic writing.

The purpose of teaching Japanese language, culture, and society, is presumably to produce people who understand Japan and the Japanese better, can explain that understanding clearly and effectively, and who can communicate with Japanese people with facility. For these purposes the Bachelor Program at the University of Bergen is more effective than most other programs. I consider the approach of this Bachelor Program to be a model from which programs at other institutions could usefully learn.

REPORT FROM PROGRAMSENSOR

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Faculty of Humanities

For the period of 2017-2018

REPORT 7: The methods of teaching Japanese script

Script teaching in the Japanese language education

This is a report on the methods of teaching Japanese script in the Japanese language Bachelor Program at the University of Bergen (UB).

The writing system of Japanese language consists of three kinds of script: hiragana, katakana and kanji. Understanding their use is one of the hardest tasks of learning this language. Its teaching methods are frequently discussed in the field of Japanese language education.

In this report, the teaching methods at the introductory level at UB are examined.

The method of teaching hiragana and katakana

The phonetic scripts, hiragana and katakana, are introduced in the later part of the JAP100 course. In the seventh week of the course, Japanese phonetics and phonology are introduced, and hiragana and katakana are taught in the following five weeks.

The phonetic script is taught on the basis of the linguistic knowledge of sounds of Japanese. It is an advantage for the students to learn the sounds and the phonetic script continuously as part of the same course. This makes it easier for students to connect the sounds and script. The Roman alphabet is only used when the sounds are explained. It is best not to

rewrite the sounds of each hiragana and katakana directly in the Roman alphabet in order to avoid the risk that the learners' pronunciations are influenced by the sound of the alphabet in their mother tongues, although many textbooks including the first two chapters in *Genki 1* which is used for the JAP110 course do this. When hiragana and katakana are introduced, students who have already learned Japanese sounds without the use of Roman script will be able to read hiragana and katakana without their mother tongues' interference.

In the JAP100 course, the phonetic script teaching is allowed plenty of time, which is good to give a solid basis to the students. For example, one whole class of katakana was dedicated to teaching how to write the students' names in katakana. This is very useful to teach an important function of katakana, which is to write words of foreign origins. Writing their own names in katakana, the students can learn how Japanese write sounds which are not included in Japanese language, for example, "ve" or "ti". The students will also learn Japanese sounds and writing system in contrast those of Norwegian.

It is also good that the students complete learning all hiragana and katakana before they start learning grammar, reading and writing. It is then easier for the students to build up further knowledge.

The method of teaching kanji

It is impractical to teach all kanji characters. What is important in kanji education is, therefore, to give the learners good starting point for their kanji learning so that they can continue to learn kanji by themselves in future. In other words, the students should learn how to learn kanji in the classes.

Kanji is first introduced in the JAP110 course. In the kanji lessons, Powerpoint presentations which show how to read and write each kanji, including the stroke order, are used. To introduce kanji, the teachers explain its imagery and structure so that the students grasp the idea of what kind of script it is. To practice writing kanji, the students are encouraged to use Japanese manuscript paper (*genkou-youshi*) to write kanji, fitting the characters into its square shape in the correct stroke order.

It is particularly important to explain that many complicated kanji consist of simple parts. This is done at this stage. The penum list of JAP110 includes some dictionaries and kanji learning books. The students learn how to look up kanji dictionaries in the early stage of learning Japanese, and learn about the radicals of kanji in relation with it. Thus kanji teaching in the introductory level lays the basis for the students to analyse the structure of the script so that they can learn kanji by themselves in future, from simple ones to more complicated ones where simple parts are combined.

The students learn quite a lot of kanji in the early stage. In addition to the ones introduced in the textbook, *Genki 1*, some more kanji selected by the teacher focus on the requirements of the Japanese language proficiency test. It is hard work for the teachers and the students to teach and learn all these kanji. Both the teachers and students wish to have more class time for kanji learning.

Comments

The script teaching in this Program has its basis in Japanese linguistics, in particular, phonetics and phonology. The methods used are well structured. Guidelines for further learning are provided at the introductory level. This has the advantage that some frequent problems among Japanese language learners, such as –

-When reading hiragana and katakana, the influence of the pronunciation of the mother tongue never disappears

-Difficulty in writing properly shaped kanji, leading to writing which is very hard to read and sometimes misleading

- Difficulty in remembering kanji.

will rarely be found among the students of this program.

While there are enough class hours for phonetic script teaching, kanji teaching suffers from a shortage of teaching hours. It would be better if a few more hours a week could be provided for teaching kanji, so that both the teachers and the students spend enough time on the subject to establish a solid basis for future learning.