

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

Self-study book of the Japanese Language: theory and practice of development

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Abstract

The relevance of this study lies in the need to create learning materials that meet the needs of modern society in the field of teaching foreign languages, and the Japanese language, in particular. The role of a Japanese language self-study book is especially growing in the context of distance learning as well as lifelong learning and supplementary education that have been in demand in recent years. This paper analyzes the conceptual foundations of a self-study book of the Japanese language and their implementation in the self-study book by M.N. Mizgulina "Japanese: The Best Self-Study Book" designed for beginner Japanese language learners. The analysis of the methodological literature on the problem of creating textbooks reveals the following: 1) the self-study book "Japanese: The Best Self-Study Book" was developed on the basis of modern methods and approaches, 2) it aims at achieving learning outcomes, and 3) it allows individualized learning to be fully implemented. The results of the analysis of conceptual foundations and their practical implementation in this self-study book at various levels (e.g., methodological, goal-setting, learning content, structure, communicative development, sociocultural development, language-specific features) demonstrate that "Japanese: The Best Self-Study Book" can be used as a model for creating self-study books for subsequent levels of Japanese language learning.

Keywords: Japanese language, Japanese language self-study book.

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Introduction

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Due to an increased interest in foreign languages, Russia's publishing house AST in 2018-2020 released a series of foreign language self-study books titled "The Best Self-Study Book". This series, in addition to popular Western languages, included several Eastern languages: Japanese, Korean, Hebrew, and Turkish. The textbooks in this series are united by the following common features of their external structure: a stylish cover design, made in colors of national flags of the target language countries, an explanatory note, a table of contents, a uniform structural organization of sections and topics, a dictionary, appendices with tables and black and white illustrations.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this work is to analyze the conceptual foundations of a Japanese language self-study book and the ways of their implementation in the textbook by M.N. Mizgulina titled "Japanese: The Best Self-Study Book"). The above-mentioned goal is due to an increased role of distance education and self-learning. Such questions are often raised in Japan with reference to Japanese as a native language (Baba, 2020) and as a foreign language (Nakagawa, 2019; Reinders et al., 2019).

Literature review

In the Russian methodology of teaching foreign languages, issues of textbook development play an important role. The foundations of the theory for foreign language textbooks were laid in the works of I.V. Rakhmanov, A.A. Mirolyubov, A.D. Klimentenko, V.V. Kraevsky, I. Ya. Lerner, V.L. Skalkin, and I.L. Bim. Prof I.V. Rakhmanov, who published the monograph "Basic Principles of Designing Textbooks" in 1940, is considered to be the founder of the theory of developing foreign language textbooks for secondary schools in the Soviet Union. The study "Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages as a Science and the Issues of a School Textbook", written by I.L. Bim in 1977 and highlighting didactic and methodological features of a foreign language textbook, has become a fundamental work in the field of foreign language textbooks (Bim, 1977). As for the Japanese language teaching methods, a monograph by L.T. Nechaeva "Scientific and Methodological Foundations of the Structure and Content of Japanese Language Textbooks for Russian Speakers" was published in 2000, followed by a series of the Japanese language university textbooks by L.T. Nechaeva, which is currently used in Russia. The development and change of approaches to teaching Japanese are considered in the study of Yoko Arashi (Arashi, 2018).

Methodology

Let us outline the main characteristics of a foreign language textbook at different levels proposed by O.A.

Maslovets. The conceptual foundations of a foreign language textbook should be considered at the following levels:

1. At the methodological level, one should indicate educational scientific approaches, on the basis of which main concepts of the textbook are built. The didactic, methodological, linguistic and psychological principles of teaching foreign languages must also be observed.
2. At the level of goal-setting: goals should be indicated, such as, for example, the formation of communicative competence, the formation of a friendly and tolerant attitude to the values of other cultures, the creation of a basis for the formation of further interest in a foreign language culture, etc.
3. At the level of content, the characteristics of the textbook should include the following: subjects of speech, topics, situations of communication; linguistic and speech material, as well as the procedural aspect, including preparation for activities, conducting activities at the level of reception and production, assessment (self-assessment).
4. At the level of structure, the correspondence of the external and internal structure is assumed. The external structure of a textbook should reflect its internal structure.
5. At the level of communicative development, the textbook should provide motivation for communicating with someone of a different linguistic culture.
6. At the level of sociocultural development, the textbook should help students to get involved in the dialogue of cultures.
7. At the level of language-specific features, the specificity of the language should be seen in characteristics of knowledge in the field of linguistics and regional studies, as well as in the volume of training in its various aspects and types of speech activity (Maslovets, 2013).

Results

The author of the Japanese language self-study book was facing a task of fulfilling both the modern general didactic requirements for foreign language self-study books and the particular methodological requirements inherent to the Japanese language. The key milestones during the development of the concept of the self-study book were four modern approaches to foreign language education: intercultural, activity-competence, personality-oriented and cognitive-communicative approaches (Tareva, 2017). The intercultural approach presupposes the formation of intercultural competence as a competence of a special nature, based on knowledge and skills, the ability to carry out intercultural communication by creating common meaning of what is happening for the communicants and ultimately achieving a positive communication result for both parties. The activity-competence approach, which appeared as a result of the intertwining of the two approaches, considers the learning process as a gradual mastery of a set of competences acquired in the course of the experience of a specific activity. The personality-oriented

approach provides for the maximum orientation to the student's personality, his/her real living and professional needs, motives, and personal development programs. From this standpoint, the designing of a textbook should be carried out not from the perspective of the logic and consistency of the subject of learning, but from the perspective of the logic of the development of the student's personality (ibid.). The choice of the cognitive-communicative approach is due to the complexity of the Japanese language for a Russian-speaking reader who is starting to learn Japanese; the presence of Kanji (Chinese characters); as well as a special grammatical structure that is not comparable with the structure of Russian or any other language belonging to the Indo-European family. "The complexity of the Japanese language, the unusual for a Russian-speaking person of Japanese logic of thinking highlight the cognitive activity of students" (Nechaeva, 2000, p.6). At a more advanced level of language learning L.T. Nechaeva recommends using a communicative-cognitive approach (ibid.).

At the level of goal-setting, a self-study book should be considered from the standpoint of compliance with the general requirements inherent to the *linguo-didactic* term "self-learning". Self-learning is characterized by: 1) the complete freedom of the *autolinguodidact* (the subject of self-learning) in choosing all the parameters of his activity; 2) his/her awareness of self-learning as a form of learning, and not any other cognitive activity; 3) full responsibility of the subject for the implementation of his/her activities in all its links, which implies the implementation of appropriate educational functions and requires the presence of appropriate internal and external conditions of activity (Ryabokon', 1997, p.106). Therefore, an *autolinguodidact* with the help of a self-study book should be able to perform the following necessary functions: motivational and stimulating; designing (planning self-learning activity); gnostic (orientation in external and internal conditions of activity); organizing (defining the task, as well as place, time, means and methods of its implementation); regulatory and executive (regulation by the subject of his/her own activity in the process of solving learning tasks); controlling (ensuring the compliance of the results of the performed activity with its goals and objectives). Also, the reader must independently select and synthesize the most relevant material, independently assess the prospects for further learning activities, etc. In M.N. Mizgulina's Japanese language self-study book "Japanese: The Best Self-Study Book" there are sufficient elements that motivate learning, make it possible to regulate methods and time of learning, carry out assessment, etc. Consequently, a self-study book can be viewed as a tool for the independent formation of communicative competence, the formation of a friendly and tolerant attitude towards the values of other cultures, etc.

The methodological requirements inherent to the Japanese language textbooks for the Russian-speaking audience were fulfilled on the basis of the provisions formulated by Prof. L.T. Nechaeva (Nechaeva, 2000). However, a self-study book can differ from a Japanese language textbook in several ways, for example, in

terms of the choice of transcription. Describing a modern Japanese language textbook for universities, N.T. Nechaeva argues that “the more attentive and serious the approach to the study of Kanji (Chinese characters), the less transcription is used” (Nechaeva, 2000, p.29). This fact is not in doubt when it comes to vocational education, therefore, in textbooks for universities published in recent years one can observe the rejection of transcription. In the case of the self-study book, due to the fact that all assessment functions are assigned to the reader, it was decided to use the Cyrillic transcription developed by E.D. Polivanov. Of the two common types of transcription (based on Latin and Cyrillic script), the choice in favor of the latter one is not accidental. The rationale for the choice was the opinion of Prof. V.M. Alpatov regarding Hepburn romanization (Latin transcription developed by D. Hepburn): “it has many shortcomings (first of all, it is not sufficiently scientific) and only one advantage: it fits well with the sound representations of English native speakers, but not Russian, and, most importantly, not Japanese”. However, the “Russian Cyrillic transcription, developed by E.D. Polivanov, is based on other, more scientific principles” (Alpatov, 2008, p. 174).

Discussions

Due to the fact that the target audience of the Japanese language self-study book are Russian native speakers, in addition to the transcription system, all phonetic, lexical and grammatical features of the Japanese language are described based on the Russian language. The most complex grammatical phenomena that have no analogues in Russian, for example, the system of directional verbs, are considered in detail on the basis of the personal pronouns system in the Russian language. When describing various types of adjectives, in addition to the terms "predicative and semi-predicative adjectives" which is common in Russian Japanese studies, easy-to-remember names adopted in Japanese reference books are given (-I and -NA adjectives).

The self-study book consists of an introductory course and 14 lessons on everyday topics: acquaintance, hobbies, travel, food, holidays, etc. The introductory lessons describe the features of pronunciation, tables with Hiragana and Katakana alphabets are provided. The differences in the phonetic structure of the Japanese and Russian languages are explained, the rules of articulation when pronouncing Japanese phonemes are described. The introductory lessons also provide general information about the grammatical structure of the Japanese language and provide preparatory exercises for determining the word order when translating from Russian into Japanese.

All lessons in the core course are clearly structured. The structure of each lesson includes a table with Kanji (Chinese characters), a description of grammatical phenomena and constructions (Iori, 2017),

exercises, learning dialogues, and texts. Each lesson introduces several topical everyday phrases and five common Japanese surnames. At the end of each lesson, keys to all assignments and exercises, as well as translations of the texts, are presented.

The organization of the text material was carried out on the basis of the general principles of the organization of texts: 1. The principle "from simple to complex" (the principle of increasing difficulties). According to this requirement, the texts should be organized according to the degree of complexity of their language material and semantic content. 2. The principle of gradual increase in the volume of text material. 3. The principle of the effectiveness of texts. This requirement assumes that in the process of ordering the texts, it is necessary to take into account the learning conditions (level of proficiency, the number of teaching hours, etc.). According to these principles, textbooks that are popular all over the world, such as "Minna no Nihongo", "Genki" and some textbooks on preparing for JLPT are built (Banno et al., 2020, Tashiro et al., 2018). In the first lessons of the self-study book, short dialogues and varieties of self-introduction stories "jiko sho:kai" are presented, in the last two lessons, texts that most vividly illustrate Japanese culture are presented: the Japanese folk tale "Crane's Return of a Favor" and the story of the Rakugo genre "Scared of Manju".

The texts and tasks for them give the reader the opportunity not only to get acquainted with the culture and customs of Japan, but also to learn how to represent their own customs and culture in direct communication.

The main task of selecting and structuring learning information when writing a self-study book was to analyze the current needs of the formation of intercultural communication skills for a wide range of readers. It was decided that the volume of the presented language and speech material should approximately correspond to CEFR A1 level or JLPT (Japanese Language Proficiency Test) N5 level. In the self-study book, modern vocabulary is widely represented, allowing students to present, for example, their profiles on social networks.

The selection of the lexical material presented in the dictionaries was carried out according to the criteria of frequency, word-formation value, semantic consistency, thematic significance (partially), compliance with rules and norms. As a result, lexical material was selected that was applicable to a variety of topics. The material contains lexical items related to Russian cultural realities (Kremlin, dacha, piroshki, blini, etc.). The lexical material includes items of all three layers of the Japanese language vocabulary: Japanese (*wago*), Chinese (*kango*) and borrowings from other languages (*gairaigo*).

It should be mentioned that the Kanji part somewhat goes beyond the N5 level, but does not quite reach the

N4 level, which roughly corresponds to the second grade of elementary school in Japan. Several kanji characters not represented in the lower levels of the JLPT were taken from the junior high school curriculum. This choice is justified by the need to provide the reader with a small list of the most common surnames in Japan in order to be able to read the name on a business card. For example, the complex Kanji "wisteria" was introduced, which Japanese schoolchildren study in junior high school, but at the same time it is included in the surnames SATO, KATO, ITO, which for decades have been in the top 15 common surnames. In the tutorial "Japanese Language: Proper Names" by E.L. Frolova, the surname SATO comes first (Frolova, 2004, p.146). In total, 210 kanji characters were selected for the self-study book, 15 characters in each lesson. At the end of the self-study book they are given in a separate table, which allows the reader to repeat the characters separately, just like in popular collections for teaching Chinese characters (Trombley et al., 2016).

Assessment (self-assessment) functions are implemented by providing support in the form of transcription and translation into Russian of grammatical constructions when explaining grammatical phenomena and the lack of support when performing exercises. Keys with correct answers are placed in separate blocks.

The structure of the self-study book includes appendices that include: the most common Russian names (30 female and 30 male names), 40 largest Russian cities (for the possibility of self-substitution when studying the topic "acquaintance"), a list of 30 verbs with the ending -ERU and -IRU, related to the conjugating type I (exception verbs), several grammatical tables that systematize the Japanese grammatical rules.

The target audience of the self-study book is a wide range of readers, the cover of the self-study books of the "Best Self-Study Book" series says that they are suitable for children from the age of 12. The volume of language and speech material presented in the self-study book roughly corresponds to the level of education in Russian schools (data obtained by analyzing school curricula) (Mizgulina, Tareva & Fedianina, 2020, p.88; Abe & Skonechny, 2020).

Although this self-study book was not specifically intended to prepare for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, it can serve as additional material for preparing for the exam (level N5), as grammatical structures included in N5 are reviewed with detailed comments.

The main goal of this series, announced by the AST publishing house, is to popularize foreign languages among a wide range of readers. An emotionally comfortable environment is very important for learning a foreign language, and a self-study book with its apprehensive explanation easily allows to overcome the barrier that arises for many readers who start learning Japanese on their own.

Conclusion

The self-study guide takes into account four modern approaches to foreign language education: intercultural, activity-competence, personality-oriented, and cognitive-communicative. The self-study book corresponds to its main goal: it provides the reader with the opportunity to independently develop a foreign language communicative competence. The topics of the sections, communication situations, language and speech material are also selected in order to provide the reader with the opportunity to independently develop a secondary linguistic personality. The presence of Cyrillic transcriptions and keys to assignments allows to exercise self-assessment at any stage of learning. The division of the self-study book into lessons and paragraphs, the insertion of headings, the implementation of appendices and dictionaries give the reader some freedom to regulate learning actions. The subject of the texts, the abundance of dialogues and the presence of lexical items related to Russian cultural realities allow the reader to imagine him/herself as a participant in the dialogue of cultures. When describing phonetic, lexical and grammatical phenomena, the features of Japanese as a foreign language are taken into account in relation to Russian-speaking students. The results of the analysis of the self-study book at different levels show that "Japanese: The Best Self-Study Book" is built on a theoretical basis that combines the foundations of the theory of a foreign language textbook, the theory of a Japanese language textbook, taking into account the linguo-didactic characteristics of the "self-learning" concept and the peculiarities of the Japanese language from the standpoint of this concept and, therefore can be used as a model for creating self-study books for subsequent levels of Japanese language learning.

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