
Book Reviews

Technology-Supported Learning In and Out of the Japanese Language Classroom: Advances in Pedagogy, Teaching and Research

Erica Zimmerman & Abigail McMeekin (Eds.). *Multilingual Matters* (2019). (353 pp.) ISBN: 978-1-78892-349-1. Price: \$59.95 (8,764 yen)

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As society progresses to be more connected and globalized, new technology in education also needs to meet the demand of a changing world. However, implementing new technology in the classroom can be challenging for many educators. In the field of English language learning, there has been a lot of research on using computer-assisted language learning (CALL) to enhance lessons and make them more meaningful for students. In contrast, using technology in Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) classes has not been researched as deeply. In *Technology-Supported Learning In and Out of the Japanese Language Classroom: Advances in Pedagogy, Teaching and Research*, editors Erica Zimmerman and Abigail McMeekin aim to lessen this information gap with 11 studies from a variety of authors using websites, applications, and software programs to build their students' understanding of Japanese. This book was published in 2019, so the technology researched in the articles is fairly recent with some programs specifically designed for JFL lessons. The purpose of this book is to find the newest

technology that can be used in the JFL classroom and provide teachers examples on implementing various technologies inside and outside the classroom.

The book itself is divided into five main parts along with an introduction and epilogue by the editors. The first three parts focus on technologies that enhance Japanese learning with individual students or in small groups. Parts four and five focus on software and websites that connect students with real-world Japanese language usage inside and outside the classroom.

Part 1, “Technology for writing and reading,” includes two studies related to this topic with a focus on individualized learning. Both chapters in Part 1 show how teachers can include individual feedback to students and allow for student autonomy where they choose their own sources of reading materials. Nina Langton’s research in Chapter 2 with screencasts is particularly useful for writing teachers. Screencasts are videos for each student of their teacher reviewing their writing assignments where the instructor provides feedback on them through voiceovers and highlighting mistakes. The university students in the study reported they valued the individual feedback they received because it helped them see where to specifically improve their grammar.

Part 2, “Collaborative online learning” explores how students can work together in their second language (L2) online. Using communication software tools like Skype, Google Hangouts, Adobe Connect, and Wordpress (for blogging), university students from 19-30 years old and with a variety of native languages (L1) met online together or wrote to each other and examined their experiences of studying and using their Japanese L2 in Japan. In Chapter 5, Yumi Takamiya and Mariya Aida Niendorf’s research delves deeper, examining not only students’ discussions on Japanese grammar and vocabulary, but also exploring how their personal identities and understanding of Japanese culture evolved during their learning journey. Since eight of the ten participating students studied abroad in Japan for various degrees of time, perceptions of their own cultures were compared with what they experienced in Japan, leading to changed viewpoints.

Part 3, “Creating and analysis of CALL programs for learning Japanese” focuses on such programs that are specifically designed for JFL classes. The

research ranges from analyzing common vocabulary used by L1 speakers to helping students understand cultural nuances of Japanese. In Chapter 6, Toru Yamada, Takako Sakai, and Cade Bushnell describe how instructors can teach the subtleties of Japanese through a *rakugo*, which is traditional Japanese storytelling by a comedian using only a fan as a prop. This type of humor for an L2 learner can be very difficult to explain and understand, so with the *rakugo* program the researchers broke down the show with short clips and quizzes to test student understanding and explain the humor.

In Part 4, “Learning through online games”, Kasumi Yamazaki and Kayo Shintaku utilize online games as a tool for L2 learning. However, the amount of teacher control over content and rules varies widely depending on the type of game. Kayo Shintaku in Chapter 10 found this to be an issue. His beginner Japanese class was learning new vocabulary through an online game he found, but the speed of the words appearing on the screen was beyond the researcher’s control. The game was still very fun for the students, but uncontrollable factors, like speed, may cause some challenges depending on the learner.

In the final section, Part 5, “Technology beyond the physical classroom”, explores how students create learning communities outside of the classroom where they can use their L2. For example, in Chapter 12, a study by Jae DiBello Takeuchi observed how two students practiced their L2 while commenting on YouTube livestreams with other L1 commenters. Takeuchi noted that online communities such as livestreams allows students to interact with authentic, real-world language and improve their language comprehension. Takeuchi also stated that the students involved in online communities were at an advanced level of Japanese, allowing them to interact with L1 speakers more easily.

In general, this book provided several studies on the benefits of implementing technology into JFL classes. Using videos, websites, online conferencing platforms, and online communities are all unique ways to get students more involved and engaged in their learning. Also, moving from teacher-directed classrooms to lessons with more student autonomy can help learners maintain motivation. After reading the book, I believe the studies are mostly beneficial for Japanese language teachers, although there are a few specific studies that

could be used in other language learning classrooms. For learners who are into self-studying, Kazuhiro Yonemoto, Asami Tsuda, and Hisako Hayashi's research in Chapter 8 provided an interesting resource to work on pronunciation with the website *eNunciate!* (although it is only available through university programs and not as a stand-alone website). For English language teachers, Langton's research in Chapter 2 and Zimmerman's study in Chapter 11 provide a few good examples on how using technology can help students understand their mistakes, regardless of what language they are studying.

While some of the technology used in this book is unique, there are a few things to keep in mind. First, while most of the technology is still fairly recent, some are becoming outdated like the Adobe Connect featured in Takamiya and Niendorf's study in Chapter 5. Many universities provide free cloud-based service accounts for all faculty and students with Google and Microsoft, which include video conferencing platforms for free, making some technology like Adobe Connect obsolete. It is possible that some of the technology may have been chosen due to low costs, free access, or level of accessibility between countries, but it was not clearly stated in the studies. Second, none of the chapters in this book mention the use of artificial intelligence (AI). Especially because AI has recently garnered widespread attention in the educational technology field, many educators are trying to figure out how best to integrate AI in their lessons. Therefore, this book may feel somewhat outdated for those who are specifically looking for ways to incorporate AI. Finally, most of the programs in this book are designed specifically for JFL classes, which means the transference of some of these CALL programs into English classes cannot be done, like the *rakugo* program used by Yamada et al. in Chapter 6. Most of the research is heavily geared towards Japanese university classes and cannot be easily accessed if you are not a student already, so many of the methods might not be as relevant for self-studying learners.

I personally enjoyed reading about the different technology used in each study and I thought the progression of each section was well organized and flowed nicely. However, the writing in this book was also highly academic, which could be a little disengaging to read for some readers. As a self-study learner I had

hoped that I could find some resources for myself to enhance my own Japanese learning, but I don't think that is easily done with the types of programs used throughout the book. Also, as an English language instructor, I am always looking for more ideas on how to better incorporate technology into my lessons. I think some of the technology in this book can be adapted for English language lessons depending on the instructor's needs. The screencast technology in Chapter 2 is one of the more versatile ways to do so in my opinion, because this form of assessment is not restricted to one specific language.

However, I also think this book ultimately provides a better way to understand what students may need in their lessons to enhance in their language learning. Whether you are teaching Japanese or English, students tend to struggle with pronunciation, vocabulary retention, and grammar acquisition as well as communicating in their L2. While this book is designed with the JFL instructor in mind, it is still a great resource for any teacher to gather ideas on how other instructors are trying to address their students' most challenging areas of language learning with the technology that is available.

Author Bio

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