

【短報】

## A New Perspective on Teaching Japanese : An Essay on Emergency Situation Assisted Instruction

### 日本語教授法に関する一考察 —— 緊急事態を用いた学習法 ——

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#### Abstract

Emergency Situation Assisted Instruction, or E.S.A.I., is an instructional proposition for teaching foreign languages. The proposition is presented as an in-service linguistic training for students of the Japanese language. However, it can be also applicable to teaching other languages.

The method of E.S.A.I. puts more focus on emergency situations that students may encounter in an unfamiliar cultural context.

E.S.A.I. is basically role-playing instruction. Its curriculum is built around emergency situations or urgent settings including sudden sickness, accidents, and natural disasters. Through these unusual situations, students will learn not only how to speak the language in the most concise and understandable way, but also the cultural background from which the language is spoken.

The effectiveness of E.S.A.I. for beginners and children would be a natural question to ask. This paper also addresses this question, as well as the necessity of using E.S.A.I. for these kinds of students.

**Keywords:** emergency, situations, instruction, foreign languages

#### I Introduction

This proposition is assumed to be presented at an in-service training for those who get involved in teaching the Japanese language to a variety of students. At the same time, the proposition will be helpful for instructors of other languages as well. As a language instructor, I share the concern about current language education with many of my colleagues. We have seen many innovative methods of teaching foreign languages. Some turned out to be just old-fashioned ideas. Others worked well to some degree, but did not help students understand the structure of a foreign language authentically in its cultural context.

In a world that becomes smaller and more multicultural with the outstanding innovation of

technologies, it is an urgent task for those who teach foreign languages to determine an effective method of instruction. Here, I would like to present a new perspective for teaching the Japanese language through a new teaching method. The idea of the method is still incomplete and it does not have an official name yet. I would like to call the method temporarily E.S.A.I., which stands for Emergency Situation Assisted Instruction.

This instruction utilizes emergency situations as instructional settings, because in those situations people speak the language most concisely. In other words, they say what they really want to say with minimum words in the most understandable way. In my opinion, this method can also be applied to teaching languages other than Japanese. For some languages, it may work rather effectively. I will

discuss it later, and hope that possible applications in other languages will be considered through many language teachers' practices.

## II Importance of Settings and Topics

These days, teachers of Japanese as a Second Language should know how to teach practical Japanese in consideration of contemporary Japanese cultural trends, because students' interest in Japanese is diversifying. Many students in Japanese classes are no longer interested in Japanese economic power or exotic oriental culture. Instead, they want to know how ordinary Japanese people live, think, work, and enjoy themselves. As Willis (1996) states, now students "must also develop the ability to use the language to communicate. Therefore, vocabulary lists and grammar drills are giving way to activities that allow students to use the new language for real purpose."

However, many current Japanese teaching methods can hardly deal with the diversity of students' interest, and only give them the impression that Japanese is too difficult to learn and sometimes hamper their desire to study it harder.

So far, most Japanese teaching methods have failed to put emphasis on a practical use or communicative approach. Though it is true that many Japanese textbooks have conversational topics and drills, the settings in which the learned expressions are used are usually very commonplace. For example, one of the most popular Japanese textbooks is designed to teach those who come to Japan in order to work in factories as a trainee and study technical skills.

Another problem that many current methods commonly have is that they are not aware of current Japanese cultural issues. Many textbooks mention the kabuki or sumo wrestling, for they are considered as indispensable part of Japanese tradition. In reality, very few foreigners like to watch kabuki. Even many Japanese have never gone to kabuki theatre. It is true that several expressions in Japanese vocabulary originated from kabuki plays. However, most people do not recognize their original meaning. It is comparable with The Bible, from which many words and phrases derive in most

European and American languages, and which forms an indispensable part of western culture. If a student wants to be an expert in Japanese culture or history, a focus on tradition may be meaningful and helpful. As far as Japanese language education is concerned, it is not necessarily an efficient way to gain communicative skills. This point would be supported by Ladson-Billings' statement (1994), "Teachers who are sincerely committed to multicultural education cannot be satisfied with superficial celebrations of heroes and holidays. This approach to content trivializes multicultural education and conveys the idea that diversity issues come into play only during celebratory moments with foods, fun, and festivals."

## III Significance of E.S.A.I.

To overcome these defects, several alternatives have been contrived. However, many of them are not functioning effectively. For example, some teachers try to use newspapers and magazines to teach students contemporary Japanese culture. But to read these materials requires students to study Japanese characters, which is very time intensive. Videotapes or other audiovisual materials have the same defects as the working trainees' textbooks mentioned earlier. And it sometimes costs much to produce these materials.

Emergency Situation Assisted Instruction is basically role-playing instruction. The curriculum is built around emergency situations. For example, in a shopping situation, current teaching methods usually comprise of vocabulary of commodities, phrases to ask prices, the way to count change, etc. E.S.A.I. would prefer a setting in which you ask for some discount, or you have lost your purse.

Other excellent situations for E.S.A.I. might be becoming lost on the way to visit friends, a sudden stomachache during travel to a remote village where no doctor lives, floods, earthquakes, traffic accidents. Through these settings, students can also learn how Japanese deal with these emergencies. (See the annexed model lesson plan) .

Answering possible questions which might be raised in regard to E.S.A.I. is helpful for understanding the characteristics of E.S.A.I. For

example, it is natural to wonder whether E.S.A.I. is applicable to beginners. Many beginner students have trouble in the use of Japanese particles. E.S.A.I. does not emphasize particles, and it may be rather easy for beginners. Availability of new materials which conform to E.S.A.I. would be another question. Though new materials are preferable, teachers can use current textbooks with some additional explanation which focuses on emergency situations. One important purpose of E.S.A.I. is efficiency. If the development of E.S.A.I. may cost a little, it will be made up by eliminating the cost of other old-fashioned teaching materials.

Applicability to children or other languages is another reasonable concern. In general, teaching children a foreign language is difficult unless they are in a country where people speak the language. However, children really need to learn an appropriate way to react to these emergency situations. Letting both teachers and children realize the importance of real life reactions will help them to be more motivated. Each language has its own expressions for emergency situations. Basically E.S.A.I. can work for other languages. What is important is to learn that reacting to emergencies in a different culture is deeply related to understanding the culture itself.

As far as teacher training is concerned, E.S.A.I. in-service training does not need to take a long time. Teachers do not need to interfere so much while students try to find a way out of the various situations.

#### IV Conclusion

In conclusion, E.S.A.I. does not mean a revolutionary change in instruction. It is rather a modification of the current teaching point of view, a shift of focus. Becoming familiar with ways to survive effectively in a different culture helps students understand foreign people much better. As the world shrinks in communication and transportation, people will have more direct interaction of many kinds abroad. E.S.A.I. helps students of foreign languages protect themselves in an appropriate manner and develop a comprehensive way of understanding other cultures.

#### V Annex

A Model Lesson Plan

Teacher: Akira Kosaka

Course Title: Japanese for Beginners

1. Unit: Shopping practice
2. Instructional goal: Students understand expressions and vocabulary concerning shopping.
3. Performance objectives: Students appropriately deal with a possible emergency while shopping.
4. Rational: Shopping is an everyday activity for students.

5. Content:	6. Instructional procedures:
/Usual expressions concerning shopping /Possible emergency situations while shopping / E m e r g e n c y e x p r e s s i o n s concerning shopping /How to act when in trouble	(a)Focusing event: How to act when you lose a purse (b)Teaching procedures: Introducing common expressions, possible emergency situations, and cultural context (c)Formative check: To see if students understand the situations which they are supposed to face (d)Students participation: Students play role of a clerk and a customer in trouble (e)Closure: Confirming the settings to which students pay attention

7. Evaluation procedures: Teacher checks which level the students achieve; letting others know about the loss of the purse, negotiating with a clerk, borrowing money from others, notifying the police of the loss, etc.
8. Materials and aids: Use of commodity items and imitation money is preferable.

#### References

- Willis, Scott. "Foreign Languages: Learning to Communicate in the Real World." *Curriculum Update* (Winter 1996) : 1-8.
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria. "What We Can Learn from Multicultural Education Research." *Educational Leadership* (May 1994) : 22-26.

# 日本語教授法に関する一考察

## —— 緊急事態を用いた学習法 ——

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### 要旨

この論文では、緊急事態を用いた学習法について考察する。この学習法は、外国人に対する日本語授業において、日常生活で用いられる通常のやりとりではなく、突発的な事態に遭遇した時、いかに簡潔でかつ日本語話者に理解しやすいように表現するかという問題意識から着想を得たものである。

盗難や事故に遭った、急病になった、自然災害に遭遇したなどの、非日常的な状況を想定するが、要は、分かりやすく効果的なコミュニケーションを追求することに言語学習の主眼を置いていきたい。

この学習法は、日本語学習だけでなく、他の外国語にも応用することができるであろう。生徒が初心者や年少者・子ども等である場合の適用可能性についても論じた。同時に、その外国語が使われる文化的背景にも、学習者の関心を向けさせることが期待される。

キーワード：緊急事態, 学習法, 外国語