

Using the Internet as an EFL Teaching Resource for Japanese Learners at University Level: A Practical Illustration of 4-skills Project Work

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Abstract

この論文では、まず日本の大学生に英語を教える時、インターネットがどのような利点と考慮すべき点をもっているのかを考察する。そしてインターネットを活用した英語の授業の特長や、学習指導案を含め具体的な授業の進め方を説明する。

This short paper will first consider the advantages (together with some disadvantages) of using the Internet as an EFL teaching resource for Japanese learners at university level. Then, the main features of a successful web-search project will be suggested, followed by a practical illustration of how such a project may be carried out, including a lesson plan.

Advantages of Using WEB Resources

The advantages may be summarized as follows:

- 1 The Internet provides students with opportunities for exposure to authentic language use and natural language that is current and frequently updated. (Fritzler '95).
 - a) The web offers a variety of topics to satisfy a diverse audience, it is versatile in its use, and it is motivating. A successful web search leaves students with a sense of achievement, personal fulfillment and increased self-confidence. (Schneiderman, '98).
 - b) The Web offers ample opportunities for project-driven language learning (Debski, Elder, Lynch & Gassin. '98). Web-based activities give students the chance to practise reading English, skimming and scanning, learn new words and collocations, be involved in writing projects as

well as speaking-oriented tasks. (Gitsaki & Taylor, '00).

- c) The Internet has become a part of our life and learning how to use it is an essential skill for students, so through the use of computers and the Internet students develop basic computer skills and learn English at the same time (Black, Klingenstein & Songer, '95).
- d) Students can continue using the Internet and be exposed to English even outside the classroom, making English an on-going process (Berge & Collins).
- e) Using the Internet enhances student autonomy (Warschauer, Turbee & Roberts). Students choose the information *they* want to read and find information that is pertinent to their particular preferences and interests. Students do not limit themselves to the information included in their textbooks (Gitsaki & Taylor, R., '00).
- f) Using the Internet is fun. Websites are full of pictures, sounds, animation, interactive pages and video clips transferring learning into a joyful and memorable experience (Schneiderman, '98).

Having listed some of the advantages of using the Web for TEFL, it seems only even-handed to point out some possible disadvantages.

- 1) Exposure to authentic materials is of itself not necessarily always advantageous to the student. The advantages will depend to some extent on student level. Certainly, level of difficulty can be defined by task requirement as well as English ability but, 'authentic' does not necessarily equate with effective language acquisition. A balanced curriculum should be maintained which, in the early stages of language acquisition, in particular, might well include examples of non-authentic/semi-authentic materials as well as authentic ones.
- 2) Re. point 2 above, an *unsuccessful* web search (location problems/computer failure/lack of comprehension of difficult authentic materials etc.), can be *demotivating* for the student, 'leaving him/her with a feeling of underachievement, personal failure and decreased self-confidence', to paraphrase with antonyms the rather ebullient language of Schneiderman ('98). It is just possible that interacting with the Internet may be a memorable, but not always a joyful experience!

The Main Features of Successful Web-search Projects

- 1) There should be a clear and specific task for students to accomplish. Merely surfing the web aimlessly is unlikely to help the student learn much. The initial excitement of using the web soon wears off and students may begin to feel bored without a specific task to accomplish.
- 2) Relevance of topic. The topic chosen should be relevant (and thus motivating) to the specific group of students involved. Students' interests vary according to age, background, etc., and topics

(sport, films, travel, literature, shopping, famous people, pop-groups, cars, motor-bikes, etc.) should be chosen with this in mind. (Teachers may make use of existing published material (e.g. Gitsaki & Taylor, 200, (2)), or, if time allows, elicit from students/offer to students a range of topics to choose from. Specific tasks should then be derived within these topic areas, according to (1) above. This will entail materials preparation: e.g. description of specific task to be achieved, worksheets, warm-up activities, etc.

- 3) Availability of abundant resources in English (target language) within the topic areas (s) chosen. The teacher should check the web-sites first to ensure that specific information that students are required to find is, in fact, available.
- 4) Students must be given help, direction and guidance to carry out specific tasks: for example, carrying out a web-search (key words/key-word combinations for searching fast), retrieving information (basic word-processing skills, e.g.: select/copy/cut/paste), downloading information, etc. If such help is not provided, much time can be wasted on the mechanics of retrieving information, which could otherwise profitably have been spent on language acquisition.
- 5) Measurability of task. Linked to (1) above, the specific task should be measurable/assessable, for example in terms of a completed worksheet, personal profile, a web card etc.
- 6) Measurability of *language acquired*. There should be some clear result to the search that can be measured in terms of language achievement. This may be, for example, in the form of a completed worksheet, profile, etc. However, in such cases, there is the danger that students may simply copy information directly from the web without actually comprehending very much. Maybe they have been employing other skills during the web search (e.g. skimming, scanning, predicting, etc.), but completion of task does not always equate with language acquisition. However, where a web-based task leads to (or is preceded by) other language activities (discussion of topic to be chosen/discussion or writing up of results of survey) language acquired may be more easily measured.
- 7) Finally, the web activity should have a specific time-frame. It may be that the project takes place not only in class, but outside, too, and if a student has internet facilities outside class, this could be an added advantage of utilizing a web-based activity. However, a time-frame is necessary in order to co-ordinate the activities of the group (discussion of results etc. may need to take place with the whole class together (or in pairs/groups at a specific time) in accordance with the language learning syllabus prevailing which, of course, is also operating under a time constraint.

Web - based Project

Teaching Situation:

School type: 1st. year university students.

Age: 18/19.

Nationality: Japanese.

Number of students in class: 14.

Length of English lesson: 90 minutes. 2/3 sessions envisaged:
(according to computer literacy of students yet to be established).

Location: computer-equipped lab and traditional classroom.

Level of students' computer skills: generally computer literate: (a separate computer-training course exists at the university).

Level of students' English ability: reading knowledge pre-intermediate/intermediate: speaking skills rather lower than this.

Gender distribution: 80% female.

TOPIC: *Plan a Day's Visit to Disneyland (USA).*

Criteria for Successful Web-search Project

The following attempts have been made to meet the criteria for a successful Web-project as outlined above:

- 1) The *specific* task is as follows: You have won a competition to go with a friend to Disneyland (USA) for one day. There are lots of interesting rides! Maybe you won't have time to go on all of them. You have decided to do the following:
 - a) Locate the site 'Disneyland' USA.
 - b) Search through the (10) rides and attractions available.
 - c) Read quickly through the information, noting down the names of the rides which you think are the most interesting.
 - d) Put the 10 rides in order of importance. (You may not have time to visit them all!). Make *notes* (*not* complete sentences) about why you think each ride is very interesting/interesting/not interesting/boring.
 - e) Select and download information and pictures from your favourite THREE rides (you will need this later to persuade your friend that you have made a good choice!).
- 2) Regarding *relevance* and *motivation*, first-year university students, (particularly the girls) are strangely enough, still fascinated by the World of Disney. It seems to fit well with the 'cute'

syndrome (that seems to persist into university years and beyond). It would, however, be necessary to check with the class as a whole that they would find the task interesting before embarking on it. Alternative one-day trips could be researched and planned if necessary.

- 3) Regarding *availability of resources* the web has been checked and a welter of relevant sources is available concerning Disneyland (USA) and the relevant rides.
- 4) Regarding *help, direction and guidance* students will receive an introductory session to check they are familiar with the computer skills necessary to locate, select and download relevant information.
- 5) Regarding *measurability of task*, students are required to:
 - a) rank order 10 Disneyland rides according to their preferences. (worksheet or notes on paper)
 - b) download information on their favourite three rides (rank ordered). (Hard copy : text and pictures).
 - c) give reasons why their particular three rides have been chosen. (worksheet or notes).
 - d) Write a letter to a friend in the USA describing their forthcoming visit and plans.
- 6) Regarding *measurability of language acquired* students are required to:
 - a) attempt to persuade their partner that their choice is the best, and use functions of agreeing / disagreeing in conversation with their partner.
 - b) Use grammatical structures of comparison such as 'more...than', 'not so...as' etc.
 - c) Write a letter to a friend in the USA explaining about their visit, and describing the planned day out + reasons for their particular plan. (entailing how to use informal language/short forms/appropriate vocabulary etc). Also lay out of address and appropriate use of salutations/valedictions. (As an alternative to the letter format, the above (Point 3) could be done in the form of students e-mailing their partners).

These are all tasks that are measurable / assessable.

- 7) Regarding *specific time-frame*, to some extent this will depend on how much work is done in class/at home. A minimum of two 90 minute sessions and a maximum of three would be the parameters.

LESSON PLAN

- 1 *Establish degree of computer literacy of students.*
- 2 *According to degree of literacy work through Units 1 & 2, or Unit 2 only of Internet English*

(Gitsaki, C. & Taylor, R.P., OUP, 2000). Also, 'Technical Tips', pp. 68/69 (How to copy pictures from the Web/How to copy text from the Web/How to format text copied from a Website/How to arrange pictures and text) are particularly useful for this project. If, however, students prove to be fully literate, this stage could be skipped.

(1st. 90-minute session completed).

3 *Introduce topic (warm-up activity):* (Traditional classroom)

(Visual aids: As many Mickey Mouses (Mickey Mice????!), Donald Ducks, Plutos etc. as one can lay hands on (ask students before class to bring in as much Disneyland memorabilia as they can)).

- * In pairs, students talk about the Disney characters they have brought in:
 - 1) (Where/when/why they bought them/got them)
 - 2) Which characters they like/hate most. Why?
 - 3) Have they been to any Disneyland theme park in Japan or abroad?
 - 4) If so, what interesting/funny/terrible things happened? (Teacher monitors).
- * Teacher elicits the most interesting stories from three or four pairs.

4 *Presentation /Preparation of Project.*

- * Teacher presents project, thus:

The *specific* task is as follows: You have won a competition to go with a friend to Disneyland (USA) for one day. There are lots of interesting rides! Maybe you won't have time to go on all of them. You have decided to do the following: (De-jumble this list with your partner!).

- 1) Locate the site 'Disneyland' USA.
- 2) When you find the site, first find the answer to this question: 'WHO OR WHAT ARE 'THE HIDDEN MICKEYS OF DISNEY?'
- 3) Search through the (10) rides and attractions available.
- 4) Read quickly through the information, noting down the names of the rides which you think are the most interesting.
- 5) Put the 10 rides in order of importance. (You may not have time to visit them all!). Make *notes* (*not* complete sentences) about why you think each ride is very interesting/interesting/not interesting/boring.
- 6) Select and download information and pictures from your favourite THREE rides (you will need this later to persuade your friend that you have made a good choice!).

(The above list is presented in *jumbled order* on a worksheet. In pairs students are asked to work out the

correct order required to work through the project smoothly).

* Teacher monitors and checks answers are correct.

(1st. half of 2nd 90-minute session completed).

* At this point students move to a computer-equipped laboratory and are given the following information:

- 1) Enter name 'Disneyland' in search box. (Yahoo search engine).
- 2) Press search button: (U.S. Disneyland, Anaheim, comes up).
- 3) Press 'Rides and Attractions' (Search).

* Further help:

- 1) Tell your teacher as soon as you have discovered the answer to the question about the 'hidden Mickeys'
- 2) When you are *looking for information* about the rides you should be reading quickly (skimming). It is not necessary to understand every word. When you are reading the information itself it may only be necessary to get the *general idea* (reading for gist). However, if you find something that is particularly interesting, you may need to read it more carefully (scanning). But, remember! It is not necessary to read *everything* very carefully and slowly, or you will not be able to finish the project in time!

* Students work on above project, teacher monitoring and assisting with language comprehension problems, checking appropriate reading skills are taking place, and dealing with any problems concerning computer use

(2nd. half of 2nd 90-minute session completed).

At the beginning of the 3rd. 90-minute session, (computer-equipped laboratory) students are given the following tasks*

- 1) Complete your list of preferred order of 10 rides and your reasons (in *note* form) for choosing that order.
- 2) Complete the choice of your *favourite three rides* with (more detailed) *notes* on why you have chosen them),
- 3) Download any information (formatted text & pictures) you have found about your *favourite three rides only*.

* Teacher tells the class they have a maximum of 30 minutes to complete the three tasks above.

* (Traditional classroom). Teacher checks all students are now ready to carry out a conversation with

their partner. (30-minute speaking activity begins).

- * Teacher explains that the aim is to persuade their partner to agree to go on the same rides that they wish to go on.
- * Teacher writes up the following functional headings on the board: Persuading/Agreeing/Disagreeing.
- * In groups of four, students try to find as many exponents of the above functions as they can in 5 minutes. Teacher elicits, and adds to list of exponents as appropriate. (E.g.: Oh, come on! I'm sure you'd enjoy it!/It's not *that* scary!/I'll hold your hand!/O.K./All right, then./No way/No way you're getting me on that thing! etc).
- * Students carry out conversation activity, teacher monitoring.
- * Feedback from class: Who came to an agreement?/Who didn't?/What did they choose? Why?

Final speaking activity: Students all stand up and walk around the classroom (space cleared in middle) trying to find someone (else?) who chose the same rides as they did, and asking why.

- * Students now have the final 30 minutes of the 3rd. 90-minute session to complete a *writing* task. (If insufficient time proves to be available, this can be done for homework or just begun in class).

Situation

You have a friend in the USA who lives quite near to Disneyland. Write a letter to him / her, telling about your visit (winning the prize holiday/when you are coming/which friend you are going with/which rides you want to go on and why, etc.).

Remember to use short forms (I'm / we're / don't etc.) and *informal* language (a *really scary*) ride. Teacher can revise appropriate language before students begin the task, if necessary, + letter format (address/salutation/valediction). Teacher monitors as writing takes place. If time allows, peer correction can also be employed.

This completes the project.

Language skills practised by students

- a) Speaking skills. Students practise this through pair/group discussion during the project. Functional and grammatical areas covered are listed below. Any major areas of difficulty concerning pronunciation would also be picked up on, during the project.
- b) Reading skills. Students practise skills of skimming, scanning, predicting, reading for gist, etc.

- c) Writing skills. Students practise note-taking/summarizing, and paraphrasing (from the information available on the Web). They also practise writing an informal letter, which entails appropriate use of short forms of the verb, and informal vocabulary.
- d) Practice of a large variety of functions and grammatical structures will occur. The major areas focussed on are as follows:

Grammatical Structures

- a) 'WH' questions: where, when, why, what etc.
- b) Present, present perfect and past tense forms.
Comparative forms: better than/more (dangerous) than/not as (scary) as, etc.

Functional Areas

- a) Expressing likes/dislikes.
- b) Persuading.
- c) Agreeing.
- d) Disagreeing.
- e) Giving reasons for Preferences.

This completes the lesson plan.

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