

Learning Japanese through prewar Shōwa short documentaries

A multimedia didactic module experience

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Abstract In the fall semester of the academic year 2012/2013, with the participation of learners enrolled in the Department of Asian and North African Studies in Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy, a study was conducted in order to create a multimedia didactic module based on authentic videos in Japanese exploiting the contribution of the net to the teaching of foreign languages. By filtering Japanese authentic videos through Internet streaming technology and organizing a modular teaching approach which included several contents, it was possible to observe the effects of this kind of activity on both oral and written language. From a sociolinguistic perspective, learners can benefit from a multimedia approach and absorb historical contents even though they are not used to watching Japanese television or Internet news streaming on a daily basis. The need can be stressed for a didactic context which could show to learners social, and thus, real linguistic-communicative activities.

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1 Internet resources and multimedia language learning

Our eyes have never been as busy as they have been in recent years. In fact, the multimedia society in which we live has gradually pushed us towards images and, in particular, motion images. We simply need to look at all the laptops on our desks, the mobile phones, the television networks and the videos that on a daily basis are being shared on the Internet through sites such as YouTube. As a matter of fact, after its appearance at the end of the 20th century, the Internet has played a central role as a text-filling and diffusion platform, turning into a huge multimedia and audiovisual archive. In particular, for the new generations, the Internet represents not only a new self-expression modality, but also a useful tool to retrieve information and obtain specific cultural knowledge. As far as language learning is concerned, it would be useful to highlight the way students nowadays access and decipher independently authentic audio-

visual material (be it music videos, movies, news, dramas or animation cartoons) or how they can easily undertake self-study sessions. Thanks to its multiformative dynamism, audiovisual material serves as an irreplaceable visual dictionary which can provide not only first-rate linguistic notions regarding grammar, syntax, vocabulary and phonetics, but also extralinguistic inputs that comprehends gestural and facial expressiveness together with proxemics.

From a sociocultural perspective, contact with authentic¹ videos becomes central when teachers intend to reach a fusion between language learning and culture transmitting, at the same time, the knowledge of different socio-cultural systems. In fact, through contact with multimedia, learners have the chance to be in contact with the whole body of distinctive traits of the societies they approach by analyzing their values, ideologies, lifestyles, social precepts and traditions (Pavone 2003). In the case of eastern societies such as Japan, from a genuine language learning perspective, the resort to multimedia materials can be useful to develop the study of formal and informal registers within the language, but also to foster metacommunicative skills which are useful to act within a geographically and historically different community such as the Japanese one. If analyzed through this perspective, one would understand the reason why resorting to video technology becomes so central to the formation of the so-called 'intercultural speaker'.

From the above-mentioned premises it is useless to say that after setting linguistic-communicative objectives, teachers have also to take the responsibility to filter the 'right' material they intend to introduce into the class. This selection process should be devoted to verify the presence of adequate linguistic and cultural foreknowledge in order not to disperse the initial interest towards the means and engender negative fallout on learning motivation. In fact, after planning and filtering the contents, it is necessary to organize the multimedia teaching approach through ad hoc didactic modules, given the contemporaneous presence of linguistic, visual, auditive and sociocultural messages which cannot be simultaneously examined by learners. These messages should be organized by the teacher through an attentive analysis of socio-cultural contents backed up by an evaluation of the cognitive load, together with contextual (situation, topic, actors, objectives), co-textual (type of language) and paratextual elements (captions, subtitles, titles) contained within the videos.

On the escort of research in the field of language learning, multimedia learning and cognitive psychology applied to language learning such as those of Mayer (2009), Sweller, Ayres and Kalyuga (2011), Danesi (1998),

1 From a language teaching perspective, the term 'authentic' utilized in this study should refer to any didactic material which is produced for native language speakers without any ad hoc manipulation for foreign language learners.

Krashen and Terrel (1983) and Paivio (2006) in this study, the author will present the possible outlets that video streaming technology can offer for both language and history learning. In particular, the author is interested in showing how videos without having any pedagogical aim can be turned into teaching material on the basis of teaching syllabus, learners' needs and language specificity. As the above-mentioned scholars have already proved over the years, images and authentic texts combined together indeed stimulate motivation by becoming irreplaceable linguistic and cultural means. This happens primarily since language acquisition seems to occur only in the presence of a contextualized input, which is in turn conveyed by authentic linguistic contents (see Krashen 1981, 1985). Moreover, as also Krashen and Terrel (1983) have stated, an audio input backed up by a video sequence can stimulate inference and, thus, a connection between sociolinguistic knowledge and comprehension tasks. This process has been labeled by the same authors as 'binding' and represents the cognitive and affective link between content and external form.

From the above introduction it is clear that it would be inconceivable to teach Japanese today by disconnecting language contents from local customs and from its historical, geographical and economic references. As a matter of fact, teachers have to compete with an audience of learners who are more updated and accustomed to exposure to authentic texts thanks to the incredible spread of the Internet and the consecutive diffusion of a huge amount of historical essays and textbooks in Japanese throughout the world. Nevertheless, historical inputs disconnected from a multimedia connection often threaten to water down the main socio-cultural contents they contain, conveying only abstract concepts together with difficult language models. Consequently, Internet streaming technology has become an irreplaceable element in supplementing the above-mentioned materials.

2 Disciplinary abilities and language learning

In the year 2001 the diffusion of multimedia teaching was acknowledged by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which has introduced into the communicative strategies of second language learning the so called 'audiovisual reception' putting sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences on the same level of language learning. Starting from interactive models suggested by the communicative approach, CEFR suggests among its directives the development of a so called 'sociopragmatic competence' devoted to the analysis of language contextual variables such as the roles played by the speakers, main topic and communicative intents from a genuine interlinguistic and intercultural perspective (Diadori, Micheli 2010). To sum up the above-mentioned competences, CEFR utilized the term 'linguistic-communicative compe-

tences' that encompasses the three dimensions of linguistics, sociolinguistics and pragmatics.

Undoubtedly, the audiovisual reception proposed by CEFR refers to a renewed teaching environment that is more oriented towards the implementation of technology within the classroom. Nevertheless, ever since the 1990s, language teaching research in Europe has already understood that multimedia can play a more incisive role if only matched with texts coming from other disciplines. The goal of this kind of research was to prepare learners for the forthcoming European plurilinguistic environment and the rising labor market needs. Among the several didactic projects presented in those years, it is worth mentioning CLIL-EMILE,² which made its first steps at the end of the 20th century. The assumption of the project was neither to replace the previous didactic methodology nor to label them as disastrous. Rather, it aimed to offer new alternative and complementary opportunities to learners by exposing them, as much as possible, to a more functional linguistic environment. In order to reach this goal, the project intended to integrate genuine linguistic contents with other disciplinary sectors in a double-focused environment. In fact, examples of CLIL-EMILE implementation in these recent years show a combination of second language learning practices (especially of English) with the teaching of other subjects such as history, geography, science, mathematics or chemistry. Nevertheless, until today there is no trace of this teaching approach combined with the Japanese language.

One of the first implementations of the above interdisciplinary teaching combined with multimedia was undertaken by the author in the fall semester during academic year 2011/2012 at the Department of Asian and North African Studies of Ca' Foscari University in Venice, Italy. The aim of the research was to create a multimedia didactic module based on authentic videos in Japanese exploiting the contribution of the net to the teaching of foreign languages. This kind of research proved that the implementation of interdisciplinary streaming resources can guarantee the transfer of interdisciplinary know-how while extending at the same time the study of language.

3 Main historical features of *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō*

For the purpose of this study, the author collected from the Internet a series of black-and-white historical documentaries about the early Shōwa

2 CLIL is the acronym for *Content and language integrated learning*. EMILE is the French acronym for *Enseignement d'une matière par l'intégration d'une langue étrangère*. For further information on this project one can consult the site: http://ec.europa.eu/languages/language-teaching/content-and-language-integrated-learning_en.htm.

Period entitled *Shōwa Shoki no Nippon* (昭和初期の日本)³ which show the main political, custom and economic changes in the life of Japan at the beginning of the period in question. The total length of the documentaries is approximately fifty minutes, but for the purpose of this study only the first segment entitled *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō* (昭和初期の東京), showing the impact of technology and western culture on Japanese society with the consequent changes occurring within the daily life of its inhabitants, will be presented in this paper. Incidentally, due to the length of this first documentary (almost eleven minutes), the author decided to split it into two files by using the software Avidemux for the purpose of creating captions and started to build a Japanese language didactic module based on its historical contents.

From a historical perspective, the first section of *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō* is divided into two main parts. The first one intends to illustrate, with the aid of black-and-white images backed by the narration, the shift from the Taishō to the Shōwa period, starting with the explanation of the origin and the meaning of the term ‘Shōwa’ (which comes from a Chinese ancient text: «let the people live brightly and in peace»). The director successively focuses on the main changes occurring inside the city which include the birth of the Tokyo subway and other new transportation means (such as cars and buses), the spread of artistic and ideological movements, the birth of entertainment businesses (such as cinema and dance halls), the increase of the city’s population (which reached almost sixty million with the consequent and progressive movement of the labor force from rural areas), the building of the first public buildings in ferroconcrete, the diffusion of western clothing together with the latest fashions among women (with «Modern Girl» fashion as a notable example) and, finally, the arrival of the airship Zeppelin in Japan in August of the fourth year of Shōwa (1929).

The second part of the documentary can be considered a retrospective of the main historical events that characterized the shift from Taishō to the Shōwa period. Notable international events among those described in the video are: the end of the First World War and the consequent Versailles Treaty (1919), the birth of the League of Nations (1920), the Washington Naval Conference (1921-1922) and the Great Kantō Earthquake (1923). As far as the beginning of the Shōwa period is concerned, the documentary presents a close up of Japan and on its economic connections with the

3 The documentaries were available on YouTube at the following links on 20th July, 2012: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDjHioHYtuo> and <http://karapaia.livedoor.biz/archives/51788230.html>. These documentaries have been shared on the Internet after having been presumably broadcasted by the Japanese channel NHK (NHK Tokyo) in the past. Judging by the language utilized by the storyteller (standard modern Japanese with the presence of some re ned syntactical elements) and by the black-and-white images, it seems they were produced during the 50s (television broadcasting in Japan started in 1953) or, at latest, in the second half of the 60s (diffusion of color televisions from the beginning of the 70s).

U.S.A., illustrating the Wall Street Crash (1929) together with the consequent effects of the Great Depression on Japan. During the presentation of these events, the video mentions the following: the dramatic fall of silk exportation (almost one third compared to previous standards), the drastic closing of numerous companies, the problem of population undernourishment and, finally, the rise in unemployment rate with a reference to Ozu Yasujiro's movie *Daigaku wo deta keredo*.

4 Technical adaptation of *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō*

In order to adapt the documentary to didactic needs, the author downloaded the documentary *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō* using the application Fast Video Download 4.2.1 which is available free of charge as an add-on for the Internet browser Mozilla Firefox 3.6. After downloading, the author checked whether the file extension was compatible with major video player software available on the net (in this case, VLC Player). In fact, even though the .fvd (Fast Video Download) format is mostly utilized to send files on major online sharing sites (such as YouTube, Google Video or Yahoo Video), due to the didactic requirements, the author decided to convert the .fvd format into an Audio Video Interleave file (commonly known as .avi), which is the standard video extension for Windows operation systems. In order to convert files from .flv into .avi format, the author used the free software Freez FLV to AVI/MPEG/WMV Converter.

Once the file was converted into the .avi format, the author split it into two sections of five minutes each using Avidemux, a free video editing software that allows one to edit, cut, combine, apply filters and recodify files in AVI, Quicktime, MPEG, OGM formats.⁴ The cut was made as the author's previous research has proved that videos longer than three to five minutes could ingenerate a «tunnel vision» (Krashen 1981) and demotivate learners due to the extremely long video sessions (Sherman 2003). After the creation of the new five-minute long .avi files, the next step was to select the video player software. Since Japanese subtitles often disorientate video players, the author opted for the use of VLC Player which supports most of the audio and video codecs on the net and file formats such as DVD, VCD and other streaming protocols.⁵ Moreover, from a didactic perspective, VLC Player proved to be extremely practical, since it allows one to insert and remove the captions according to the type of activity one intends to perform.

4 Other formats can be utilized if the relative codecs are already installed into the system.

5 VLC Player is also available in many versions for different operating systems such as GNU/Linux, Microsoft Windows, Mac OS X, BeOS, BSD, Pocket PC and Solaris.



Figure 1.
Captions for the
documentary
*Shōwa Shoki no
Tōkyō* made with
Aegisub software.

5 An interdisciplinary multimedial didactic module based on the historical documentary *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō*

In order to build a didactic module based on *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō* the first step was to create captions.⁶ For this study, the free software Aegisub was used (Fig. 1). Since all of the activities produced had to be backed up by text authenticity, transcription activity became vital to the elaboration of the didactic module from the following perspectives:

- a. Interdisciplinary perspective: since the module intends to transmit both historical (technical lexicon, main events, characters) and language contents (language registers, syntax, ideograms) as indicated by the CLIL directives.
- b. Multimedia perspective: since the double presence of written (captions) and oral (narration) texts allows the learners to interact with authentic audiovisual texts through a process of ‘contents reconstruction’ led by the teacher. In fact, thanks to the captions, learners can, as an example, infer the reading of ideograms without resorting to bilingual dictionaries (Vitucci 2010).
- c. Cognitive/neurolinguistic perspective: since the presence of captions

⁶ It is advisable to create a macro-level distinction between captions and subtitles activities. As the author previous research revealed, it is better to distinguish the above activities according to language level. In the case of an intermediate-advanced level, a transcription activity based on captions can indeed be easy to manage, since learners already possess the main lexicon-syntactical structures of Japanese. In the case of lower levels, captions can be utilized only if previously created by the teacher. In this case, one can also resort to subtitle-centered activities where learners translate the main text in their mother language with the aid of the teacher or bilingual dictionaries.

reduces the cognitive load (Sweller 2011) stimulating the connection of new linguistic inputs with learners' prior knowledge along with a positive mood through the implication of the right hemisphere of the brain (Danesi 1998).⁷

After the creation of captions aimed at centering the formative process on audiovisual texts, the author proceeded to the creation and the subdivision of the activities according to language abilities.⁸ In the case of this study, the author merged oral and written comprehension abilities into a single 'audiovisual comprehension ability' since captions and titles on the screen had to be considered as part of the so-called written comprehension indicated by CEFR. Subsequently, it was observed that the presence of multimedia inputs contributed to link audiovisual comprehension with oral and written production while discarding the classic division of language abilities which divided language competences into four distinctive sections. The formulation that emerged is given in Tables 1 and 2.

Main activities for the multimedia didactic module *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō*

Main lexicon (A)	→ 次の表現を知っていますか。日本語で考え、説明してみてください。
Take notes (B)	→ ビデオを聞きながら分かったことばをノートに書いてみてください。
Fill in the blanks (C) Phrases	→ もう一度ビデオを視聴し、次の文章を完成させなさい。
Multiple choice (D)	→ もう一度ビデオを視聴し、A~Dの適当な文章の一つを選びなさい。
Answer the questions (E)	→ 次の質問に答えなさい。
Reading ideograms (F)	→ 次の熟語の読み方をひらがなで書きなさい…
Writing ideograms (G)	→ ひらがなを漢字にしなさい。
Fill in the blanks (H) Main text	→ ビデオを視聴し、番号のある箇所をひらがなで埋めなさい。
Write phrases (I)	→ 例のように次の元号の説明をしなさい。

7 According to Danesi, it is of paramount importance to introduce at the beginning of each didactic module linguistic categories that are presented in real semantic contexts and/or through sensory stimuli (visual and audio) in order to facilitate the learning process. In fact, the contact with audiovisual inputs will stimulate the neurological activity of the right hemisphere of the brain and augment learning motivation thanks to the involvement of the visual-spatial dimension. After the involvement of the right hemisphere, Danesi suggests to organize language teaching by shifting gradually to the left hemisphere of the brain, with the aim of reaching complementarity and interaction between the two.

8 Due to space available for this paper, not all the activities will be presented here in full detail.

Complete the phrases (L)	→ 次の文章を完成させなさい。()の中の動詞を活用しなさい。
Choose the right summary (M)	→ 下から正しいビデオのまとめを一つ選びなさい。
Listen and read the text (N)	→ もう一度ビデオを視聴し、テキストを読みなさい。
Translation (O)	→ テキストをイタリア語で翻訳しなさい。

Table 1. Main activities for the multimedia didactic module *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō* with Japanese titles.

Audiovisual Comprehension

1. Take notes (B)*
2. Fill in the blanks (C) phrases*
3. Multiple choice (D)*
4. Answer the questions (E)*
5. Reading ideograms (F)
6. Fill in the blanks (H) main text*
7. Choose the right summary (M)
8. Listen and read the text (N)*
9. Translation (O)*

Oral Production

1. Main lexicon (A)
2. Listen and read the text (N)*
3. Discuss with the teacher
4. Discuss with your peers
5. Eventual role-play

Written Production

1. Take notes (B)*
2. Fill in the blanks (C) phrases*
3. Multiple choice (D)*
4. Answer the questions (E)*
5. Writing ideograms (G)
6. Fill in the blanks (H) main text*
7. Write phrases (I)
8. Complete the phrases (L)
9. Translation (O)*

Table 2. Multimedia didactic module divided per language competency.

As can be observed from Tables 1 and 2, the didactic proposal was composed of thirteen main activities⁹ which principally concerned audiovisual comprehension and written production. Among them, some are marked with a different color which indicate that the activity must be carried out with the aid of the video (as also suggested by the Japanese title) while the symbol «*» denotes that the activity involves one of the other language competencies.

⁹ The presentation of the topic together with sound-off vision and brainstorming is not included.

Before starting the activities it would be advisable to introduce the didactic module through a brainstorming session aimed at establishing learners' prior knowledge about the topic. Subsequently, after the brainstorming phase, it would be recommendable to show the video sequence muted and start a discussion with the class asking learners what they saw and about the probable topic of the video. The discussion will help learners to acclimatize themselves and lower the affective filter (Krashen 1981).

After the above 'warming up' phase, the teacher can then introduce Activity A, whereby the main lexicon is presented. In the case of *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō* it would be useful to utilize official Japanese history textbooks in order to present learners with lexical items such as those studied by native speakers of Japanese in Japan. In the case of this study, the secondary school textbook *Rekishi - Mirai wo mitsumete* (歴史・未来をみつめて) is used in order to verify if the lexical items presented in the documentary matched with the actual historical ones presented in Japanese school textbooks. As a result, the following lexical features were quickly identified (Tab. 3):

Documentary <i>Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō</i>	History Manual <i>Rekishi - Mirai wo mitsumete</i>
ベルサイユ講和条約の調印	... ベルサイユ条約を結びました... (p. 150)
国際的機構「国際連盟」の発足	... 国際連盟の設立も決まりました... (p. 151)
ワシントン会議での軍縮の論議	(absent)
関東大震災の混乱	... 関東大震災の打撃で日本の経済は... (p. 162)
ニューヨーク ウォール街 株の大暴落	(absent)
世界大恐慌	... 世界恐慌の影響を受け... (p. 162)
企業の総業短縮、解雇、倒産	... たくさんの企業が倒産し、失業者がふえ... (p. 162)

Table 3. Lexical parallelism between the documentary *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō* and the history textbook *Rekishi - Mirai wo mitsumete*.

As can be observed from Table 3, there was indeed a lexical correspondence between the documentary and the textbook, despite a few differences such as in the case of ベルサイユ講和条約 and ベルサイユ条約 or 世界大恐慌 and 世界恐慌. These differences may be so primarily due to syntactical needs. In the case of the textbook, one can note a more discursive style characterized by a syntactical sophistication aimed at fostering the re-production of standard Japanese within an oral scholastic/formal context. In contrast, in the case of the documentary lexicon, being accompanied by images, one can observe a tendency towards an essential,

but at the same time refined language characterized by the use of lexical compounds (熟語). From a teaching perspective, in order to present historical contents to non-native learners, it would be advisable to introduce a lexicon that is shared by as much media as possible (history textbooks, documentaries, newspapers, TV programs, Internet sites, and so forth) in order to provide learners with disciplinary contents that can be easily retrieved when needed. Moreover, the lexicon should be presented by avoiding direct translation of the terms. In fact, by exploiting the evocative power of Kanji comprised in the captions, the teacher can try to let the learners infer the meaning of the words and let them explain in simple Japanese. In particular, since learners have already watched the video without the sound, it is extremely important to allow them to link the lexicon with the corresponding visual content. Only in this way will they be able to achieve the «binding» (Krashen, Terrel 1983) which will help them associate words with their meaning in context without resorting to bilingual translation.

From a textual perspective, the aim of the module is not to simply deliver historical and language contents, but rather to let the learners gradually rebuild them through the activities they are asked to perform. In fact, it is noteworthy that learners will be able to focus on the audiovisual text of the documentary from Activities B, C, D and H, and subsequently develop a sense of independence vis-à-vis the contents thanks to the interaction they establish with their peers within the class. Using previous research by the author, it can be verified, for example, that resorting to interlanguage during group sessions with the use of captions on screen indeed does stimulate learners to: 1. Retrieve core information during audiovisual sessions, 2. build knowledge without the intervention of the teacher, and 3. share it with the whole class.

As far as the written and comprehension skills are concerned, the author included questions about the video content in the module using Activity E. Before delivering them to learners, it could be profitable to explain to them that they are asked to retrieve historical information within the documentary (intensive comprehension) and they will have to reply to questions using complete answers in Japanese. In fact, as the previous research proves, Italian learners often tend to forget syntactical elements (such as the subject or complements) and to shorten propositions when answering. If not rectified, this habit can become particularly insidious, since it hampers not only written production, but also oral output. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this habit also disadvantages the learners, since Japanese speakers are always required to answer properly to questions without inventing, shortening or dodging questions.

E) 次の質問に答えなさい。

1) 「昭和時代」は何年何月何日に始まりましたか。

2) 昭和2年に浅草で何がありましたか。

3) 昭和時代に何が登場しましたか。

4) この頃の大都市の人口はどうになりましたか。

5) 昭和時代に何という新しい風俗が生まれましたか。

Table 4. Example of Intensive Comprehension and Written Skills combined in Activity E.

In order to foster and reinforce a correct habit in writing (and speaking), Activities I and L were introduced. In contrast with Activity E where learners do not follow a predetermined linguistic model, during Activities I and L they are asked to create propositions on the basis of a linguistic path which is directly extracted from the documentary and with an explicit historical content (Table 5).

L) 次の文章を完成させなさい。()の中の動詞も活用しなさい。

1 1989年1月8日に元号が「昭和」 _____ 「平成」に改められ「平成時代」が _____。

2 1989年（平成元年）にはベルリンの壁が崩壊 _____、東ヨーロッパでは次々と革命が（起こる） _____。

3 1995年（平成7年）1月には阪神・淡路大震災が _____、3月にはオウム真理教の地下鉄サリン事件が発生 _____。

Table 5. Written Skills - Activity L.

To conclude the written activities, a concise Kanji module was introduced aiming at fostering ideogram reading (Activity F) and writing skills (Activity G). Compounds in Kanji were always introduced in pairs in relation to synonymy, antonymy, homophony or quasi-homophony¹⁰ (Tab. 6). After the transcription of the reading in Kana, learners are asked to translate the terms in their native language.

- F) 次の熟語の読み方をひらがなで書きなさい。読み方を書いてから意味をイタリア語で書きなさい。(読み仮名を横書きに書いてください)

注意：電子辞書の使用は禁止！

例：→ 学校 がっこう (scuola)	
1	元号 _____ () → 年号 _____ ()
2	古典 _____ () → 個展 _____ ()
3	思想 _____ () → 幻想 _____ ()
4	運動 _____ () → 運営 _____ ()
5	芸術 _____ () → 芸能 _____ ()
6	洋服 _____ () → 和服 _____ ()
7	登場 _____ () → 登山 _____ ()
8	期待 _____ () → 招待 _____ ()
9	時期 _____ () → 期限 _____ ()
10	機嫌 _____ () → 紀元 _____ ()
11	風俗 _____ () → 風速 _____ ()
12	鉄筋 _____ () → 鉄道 _____ ()
13	交通 _____ () → 交流 _____ ()

Table 6. Kanji Reading - Activity F.

During this Kanji module it is preferable not to let learners use any kind of dictionary. This prohibition is fundamental, since it allows them to execute self-check and understand their weak and strong points as far as

10 Also pairs with a single Kanji in common can be introduced.

Kanjis are concerned. During the following Activity G, learners are expected to write down Kanji by themselves starting with a term written in Hiragana and contextualized by the translation. The terms were selected according to their relation to the documentary and to learners' vocabulary needs. In order to facilitate memorization, the teacher can also introduce lexical items which have already been presented in the previous activity.

As previously stated, during the multimedia module the teacher does not provide learners with the entire script of the documentary. In fact, it is only during the final phase of the didactic module that they are allowed to read and translate it (Activity N), since the aim of the entire activity is to instill in them the responsibility of rebuilding an historical text in Japanese for themselves. Before this phase, the author has created an extensive comprehension activity (Activity M) where learners are expected to analyze five different summaries of the documentary in Japanese and select the right one (Tab. 7). This activity has proven to be tremendously meaningful, since it synthesizes the two main aspects of this study, i.e. the centrality of the text within language teaching such as suggested by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the combination of different disciplinary activities (in this case, history and language teaching) such European projects like CLIL-EMILE propose.

M) 下から正しいビデオのまとめを一つ選びなさい。

1926年12月25日 元号が「大正」から「昭和」に改められ、長い「昭和時代」が始まった。昭和5年 浅草・上野間に日本で初めての地下鉄が開通し、新しい乗り物や便利な機械の登場。新しい思想や芸術運動の登場。この頃、大都市では人口が急速に増え、中心部のビルの建設や交通機関の整備も進んで、日々、近代的な装いを整えつつあった。「モガ」すなわち「モダン・ガール」など新しい風俗も生まれていた。

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交通機関の整備も進んで、日々、近代的な装いを整えつつあった。「モガ」すなわち「モダン・ガール」など新しい風俗も生まれていた。

□ 1926年12月25日 元号が「江戸」から「昭和」に改められ、長い「昭和時代」が始まった。昭和5年 浅草・上野間に日本で初めての地下鉄が開通し、新しい乗り物や便利な機械の登場。新しい思想や芸術運動の登場。この頃、大都市では人口が急速に増え、中心部のビルの建設や交通機関の整備も進んで、日々、近代的な装いを整えつつあった。「モガ」すなわち「モダン・ガングロ」など新しい風俗も生まれていた。

Table 7. Extensive Comprehension - Activity M.

6 Testing the didactic module *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō*

The author could test the above didactic unit during the fall semester of the academic year 2012/2013 in the Department of Asian and North African Studies in Ca' Foscari University, Venice with the participation of 130 learners enrolled in a third-year Japanese class. Most of the learners who took part in the testing already passed first- and second- year Japanese language tests by acquiring a language level between the fourth and third level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (日本語能力試験).

In order to allow the learners to become familiar with the content, before introducing the didactic unit the author selected a reading text in Japanese concerning the Shōwa period from the secondary school textbook *Rekishi - Mirai wo mitsumete* (歴史・未来をみつめて). Subsequently, after the reading stage and before the video showing, the author identified the following video selection principles:

- a. Video Length. Since it is extremely important not to discourage learners with lengthy videos, the author based on previous research to select a five-minute sequence from the documentary *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō*, of which only two minutes and a half were actually spoken. In order not to engender the «tunnel vision» theorized by Krashen (1981) and to stimulate aural comprehension, the author aimed to recreate the so-called «redundancy principle» (Mayer 2009) by exploiting the mediation of images and captions within the documentary.
- b. Language Level. Since the didactic module aims to transmit original language contents without altering or simplifying them, the author selected the video by focusing primarily on the lexicon, syntax and pragmatic aspects of language. As far as language speed and diaphasic traits are concerned, an expository text in standard Japanese (標準語) was introduced since it was more understandable and 'emotionally' more familiar to learners.
- c. Documentary setting. As far as setting is concerned, the author selected

multimedia contents with cross-references to Japanese society and history to support the visual text. The selection of setting is useful if one intends to stimulate the so-called ‘cumulative learning’, since it allows learners to skilfully contextualize new language contents by activating their prior knowledge and lowering, at the same time, the affective filter.

- d. Image quality. A good image quality represents an indefeasible element when dealing with language learning. Taking into consideration the inherent multimedia features which characterize Japanese language, it would be absurd to introduce videos without being able to read subtitles or captions. As already demonstrated, a bad image quality can hamper Kanji reading.

For this study, the neuro-linguistic research carried out by Danesi (which states that in order to strengthen learners cognitive abilities, it is necessary to prearrange a didactic module that first introduces language learning activities linked with the right hemisphere of the brain) was merged with Balboni’s model (1994) by proposing a didactic unit based on «a harmonic game of cross-references between the two hemispheres: starting with the motivation phase which integrates emotions and curiosity (typical of the right brain activities) with the analysis of left brain needs, one shifts to a globality phase (right modality) which is followed by the analysis of language (left modality) in order to reach a synthesis and a final control» (Danesi 1998, p. 52). Consequently, from a genuine theoretical perspective, even though the didactic unit followed the bimodal parameters (Danesi 1998), it was divided into the three following stages: 1. Motivation-Globality, 2. Analysis-Synthesis-Observation, and 3. Control such as suggested by Balboni (Fig. 2).

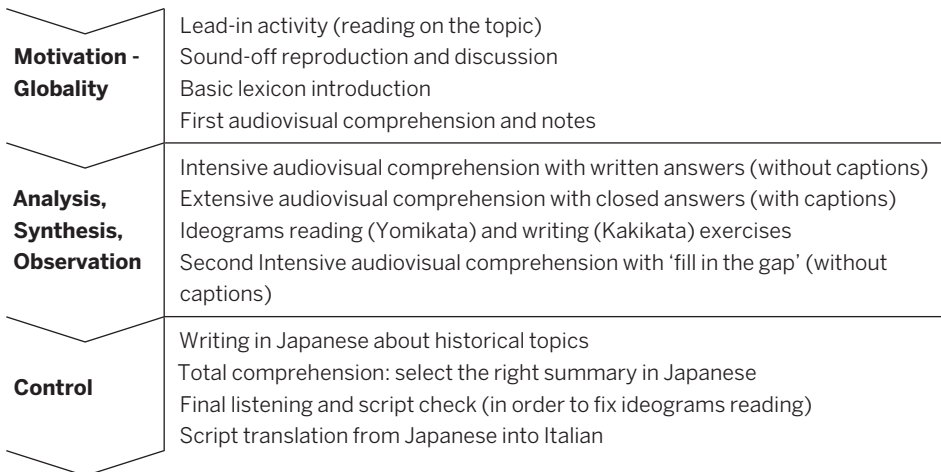


Figure 2. Outline of the activities divided per learning stages (Balboni 1994).

From an operational perspective, this study intends to stress the importance of introducing original linguistic-communicative contents selected from the Internet. As also stated by Vedovelli 2002, even though the general framework which considers instruction, exposition and explanation cannot be questioned, the classroom cannot be considered anymore as a place where only simulation and approximation take place. In particular, the utilization of historical documentaries extrapolated through the Internet allowed the author to focus on the roles that the teacher is called to play during the didactic unit, since by working with multimedia contents teachers is no longer the only linguistic model within the classroom. After testing the above didactic unit, the author found that three major roles can be played vis-à-vis learners:

- a. **Leader.** This is the role that the teacher plays during frontal lessons when no pair/group work is expected and when he/she presents new language contents or creates grammar and sociolinguistic integration modules for the learners. In the case of this study, this role emerged during the lead-in phase (Activity A) and when the author contextualized the audiovisual contents before implementing them.
- b. **Follower.** This is the role that the teacher plays during pair/group work in order to support classroom activities without intervening with his/her linguistic know-how. In the case of this study, this role revealed to be fundamental during production activities such as B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I and L. During activity G, for example, learners were asked to write down ideograms starting from Hiragana syllables (so-called *Kakikata* exercises). The author was able to observe that, with his intervention, learners often risked losing concentration and diverting their attention away from the task. Consequently, as a follower, during the above activities it was fundamental not to rectify any grammatical, syntactical or writing mistakes. In particular, during activity B, it proved to be more profitable gathering information from learners and then sharing them with the entire class, rather than judging the output quality. By acting as a follower, the teacher should always bear in mind that he/she does not represent the only source of language within the classroom and that he/she should rather consider himself/herself to mediate between multimedia contents and learning activities. In particular, during the implementation of the didactic unit at Ca' Foscari University, in order to stimulate motivation without his intervention, the author tried to implement the so-called 'receptive learning' through activities (such as sound-off vision, introductory discussion and taking notes) which aimed at inciting a sense of active discovery and interest towards the contents.
- c. **Editor.** This is the role the teacher plays whenever he/she intervenes using his/her language know-how in order to correct mistakes which could hamper activity flow (such as in the case of a wrong translation).

Among the above mentioned roles, this is the most difficult to manage since even though teachers have the responsibility to direct the didactic flow, on the other hand it would be preferable not to interfere during learners' language production activities.

Taking the above roles into consideration, the didactic unit testing revealed to be particularly meaningful since it stimulated the author to measure his didactic intervention by adapting his role according to activity specificness and learners' needs from time to time. This kind of 'dynamic' attitude allowed the author not to be constantly 'present' during the tasks. As a matter of fact, one should bear in mind that when dealing with multimedia contents, teachers can direct learners' interest towards the means in order to stimulate a sense of autonomy and deeper self-esteem. To reach this goal, it will be necessary to adopt a flexible behavior, through which learners can be rewarded as they can interact independently with original contents and without resorting to the teacher's help (see also Vitucci 2012).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this study intended to stress the centrality of multimedia contents by harnessing their socio-cultural values. As already stated in the introduction, today it would be inconceivable to teach Japanese by disconnecting language contents from local customs as well as historical, geographical and economic references. In fact, in contrast to traditional language teaching, the author intends to underline the need for a didactic context which can present learners with social, and subsequently, real linguistic-communicative activities. Historical documentaries clearly prove that Japanese language learners can be exposed to interdisciplinary contents if only methodology is rethought on the basis of a renewed interaction with the teacher inside the class. Finally, this study suggests that artificiality, which is typical of language classroom communication, can be substituted by a more 'natural' approach backed by the selection of a variety of textual contents. In fact, the implementation of authentic interdisciplinary materials will undoubtedly improve the quality of communication fluxes within the class that the teacher is called to direct.

The didactic module presented in this study has been utilized in combination with the historical documentary *Shōwa Shoki no Tōkyō* in order to foster a multidisciplinary and multimedia approach to Japanese language teaching. However, it should not be considered as the final version, since the author intends to improve its original structure. While creating the module, all linguistic competences (audio-visual comprehension, written and oral production) were covered in order to take advantage of authentic audio-visual streaming materials that contribute to Japanese language teaching. The author hopes to present further outcomes of this research in the future.

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