"*LEARNING JAPANESE IS A HEADACHE FOR ME*": AN INVESTIGATION OF ENGLISH MAJORS' LEARNING JAPANESE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN CHINA

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Abstract:

With the development of economic globalization in the past decades, the demand for Japanese-speaking talents has been increasing and an unprecedented upsurge of learning Japanese has appeared at tertiary education in China. In terms of English majors, not only are they stipulated to lay a solid foundation for English, but they also need to take another foreign language course and meet corresponding requirements. Due to the national and international environment nowadays, more and more English majors make their own choices in learning Japanese as another foreign language. However, compared with studies focusing on Japanese major education, research concerning non-major education, including English majors' learning Japanese as a second language, is still scant. The questionnaires and interviews conducted at a university in Jiangsu, China indicated that English majors' Japanese learning was somewhat problematic, which included poor motivations, inappropriate learning habits, and some apparent learning difficulties. Actually, it is found that both subjective elements (i.e. emotional resistance and discrimination, unawareness of the importance of Japanese, inappropriate learning methods) and objective elements (i.e. misallocation of time and class periods, disadvantages of the teaching material) contributed to the situation. Therefore, learning strategies have been put forward in this paper to help students optimize their learning.

Keywords: English majors; Japanese language; learning condition; learning strategies

1. Introduction

With the acceleration of internationalization and the frequency of international communication nowadays, our society sets a higher demand for multilingual talents. In the context of China, in terms of English majors, not only are they required to lay a solid

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foundation for English, but they also need to take another foreign language course and meet corresponding requirements. The course intends to help students master the correct pronunciation and intonation of that language, then equip them with integrated skills of it to a certain extent, and have a good understanding of the corresponding society to broaden their horizons. As a foundation course, it also prepares students for further language learning in the future (Ministry of Education, 1993). China and Japan are of profound historical origin. As the communication between China and Japan has become increasingly frequent, more and more English majors make their own choices in learning Japanese as another foreign language.

In the studies of Japanese as a second language for English majors, a large percentage of research studies focus on language teaching. More than 400 papers in China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) (http://kns.cnki.net/kns/brief/default_result.aspx, last assessed on July 29, 2018) concentrate on this topic. They mainly reveal the current conditions and problems of Japanese teaching, analyze the possible reasons, and subsequently discuss teaching strategies for teachers (e.g. Lu, 2008; Zhou & Sui, 2011), while some research shed light on students' learning motivations (e.g. Wang, 2005). However, quite a few studies (e.g. Wu, 2014) aim to do an overall survey on English majors' Japanese learning, including learning motivations, habits and difficulties, explore potential reasons, and hence put forward learning strategies from students' perspective. In fact, since the 1970s, the attention on foreign language studies has been transferred from "teaching" to "learning"; learning is gaining more emphasis (Sheng, 1990).

This paper attempts to give a clear picture of the current condition of English majors' learning Japanese as a second language, reveal and analyze the potential problems, and propose learning strategies from students' point of view.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The definition of a second language
In the area of second language acquisition (SLA), second languages are broadly defined as any languages learnt subsequent to the acquisition of the first language, regardless of the level or sequence. They include both languages of wider communication within the local community and truly foreign languages having no local users (Mitchell & Myles, 2004).

In China, besides English, English major students are stipulated to take an elective from Japanese, French, German, or Russian (depending on each university) as another foreign language course in Year 2 and 3 (Ministry of Education, 1993). According to SLA theories, all of these foregoing languages can be defined as "second languages" without doubt. However, since Japanese, French, German and Russian are learnt subsequent to English, in China, they are usually called "second foreign languages" for English majors for easier distinction of the sequence and importance of

learning by Ministry of Education, educators and students. The paper accepts this form of address, yet still define them as "second languages" where needed.

2.2 Japanese education at tertiary level in China

Japanese education at tertiary level in China falls into two main streams, namely major and non-major Japanese education (Wu, 2014). Japanese major students are stipulated to receive systematic training in Japanese listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, acquire basic knowledge and learn basic theories of the Japanese language, literature, history, politics, economics, diplomacy, culture, and so on, which prepares them to be qualified in the areas of translation, teaching, journalism, etc. in the future. The main courses include Basic Japanese, Advanced Japanese, Japanese Listening and Speaking, Japanese Writing, Translation Theories and Practices, Selected Readings of Japanese News Publications, Japanese Literature, Introduction to Linguistics, Survey of Japan, so on and so forth (Ministry of Education, 2000, 2001).

With regard to non-major students, they can further be classified into two: college Japanese students and Japanese-as-a-second-foreign-language students (Wu, 2014). As a compulsory college foreign language course for non-foreign-language majors, college Japanese is a substitution for college English course. Students need to participate in examinations like College Japanese Test-Level 4 and 6, and meet requirements for graduation. Japanese-as-a-second-foreign-language course is usually for English majors. According to the teaching syllabus, English majors are required to take an elective from Japanese, French, German, or Russian (depending on each university) as a second foreign language course in Year 2 and 3. Regarding Japanese, students should master the correct pronunciation and intonation of Japanese, have preliminary capabilities of Japanese reading, listening, writing and speaking, know Japanese society and culture to a certain extent, and lay a good foundation for future learning (Ministry of Education, 1993) .

2.3 Review of previous research studies

With the development of language acquisition theories and teaching methodologies at home and abroad, many new issues have arisen in Japanese education during the past decades. A large number of studies revolve on Japanese major education (Han & Jiang, 2013), such as Xiu (2008, 2011, 2018), Yao (2018), yet research concerning non-major education, including English majors' learning Japanese as a second language, is still scant (Han & Jiang, 2013). Previous research studies in English majors' learning Japanese as a second language can be categorized into two aspects.

The first aspect occupies the largest proportion, which focuses on current challenges in Japanese teaching, analyzes the possible reasons, and hence probes into teaching strategies for teachers (e.g. Han & Jiang, 2013; Lu, 2008; Zhou & Sui, 2011). For instance, Han & Jiang (2013) give a clear picture of different kinds of problems of non-Japanese major teaching in China, which include lack of clear teaching objectives, low teaching quality, exam-oriented teaching mode, ignorance of the introduction of

Japanese culture, weakness in teaching Japanese for specific purposes, and teacher-centred teaching approach. These problems impair the teaching outcomes and thus lead to students' low learning motivations. For the enhancement of teaching, they also come up with some strategies for educators' reference, including having clear teaching objectives, enhancing the quality of teaching, standardizing teaching, merging Japanese culture into language teaching, emphasizing teaching Japanese for specific purposes, and adopting student-centred teaching mode. In addition, other researchers try to integrate up-to-date teaching methodologies and philosophies into Japanese teaching, such as cooperative learning (Chen, 2017), flipped classroom (Zhou, 2015), computer-assisted language learning (Liu, 2011), task-based language teaching (Xiang, Wu & Luo, 2010), differentiation strategies (Wang, 2010), to name just a few.

The second aspect is relevant to students' learning motivations. Miao's (2011) research is a good example. She conducted one-to-one interviews among 20 English major students in Henan Province, China. By employing Gardner and Lambert's (1972) classification of second language motivation, she found out that students' learning motivations fell into two broad categories: integrative motivation (25%, having a strong interest in the people and culture represented by the other group) and instrumental motivation (75%, seeing the practical values and needs to learn a language). Moreover, Cang and Tong (2014) investigated the relevance of students' motivations to their test scores, discovering the positive correlation between students' strong motivation and high test score.

After looking across research in English majors' learning Japanese as a second language, it is found that quite a few studies (e.g. Wu, 2014) intend to do an overall survey on English majors' Japanese learning, including learning motivations, habits and difficulties, explore potential reasons, and hence present learning strategies from students' perspective, which were the focuses of the current study. In fact, the attention on foreign language studies has been transferred from "teaching" to "learning" since the 1970s, and learning is gaining more attention (Sheng, 1990). To achieve these objectives, the following research questions were addressed:

1) What are the learning motivations, habits and difficulties of English majors' learning Japanese as a second language?
2) What account for the situations?
3) What can students do to optimize their learning?

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

Two research instruments were applied to this investigation, namely questionnaires and one-to-one interviews. So, this research can be seen as a mixed-method research study, which is also defined as a methodological triangulation or mixed model (Creswell, 2003). It places emphasis on the combination of qualitative and quantitative

study in one research, and therefore helps enhance the validity or trustworthiness of the research.

A questionnaire investigation was conducted among 100 English majors at a university in Jiangsu, China. They were chosen randomly to participate in the investigation, of which sophomores, seniors and juniors occupied approximately the same proportion in total. The respondents had different learning conditions and all started learning Japanese when they were sophomores. The questionnaire covered the following aspects: prominent learning motivations, learning time and habits, and learning difficulties. In order to make it easier for subjects to finish the questionnaires, as well as to simplify the process of analysis, all the questions were multiple choices.

After selection, 14 students were invited to participate in one-to-one interviews. Each interview was face-to-face. It lasted about 20 minutes in duration. It was semi-structured after the careful study of each respondent's questionnaire, which intended to make sure of the previous results and learn more about the reasons behind each subject's learning condition. It included two steps: firstly, each subject answered prepared questions concerning his or her questionnaire; secondly, he or she could make supplementary comments on his or her questionnaire results, as well as make an evaluation of his or her Japanese learning. In order to reduce subjects' anxiety, each interview was conducted in Chinese.

The researcher then transcribed all the data into Chinese and translated the transcriptions into English for analysis. Every effort was made to keep the English translation as close to Chinese as possible. Half of the transcriptions were double-checked by two bilingual (Chinese and English) professors who are experienced in applied linguistics to ensure the quality of the translations.

3.2 Data analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using the Microsoft Office Excel analysis, intended to calculate the percentage of responses to each item.

In terms of the interviews, transcription was firstly employed to each recording. Then, by studying and analyzing the data with "coding", the researcher attempted to find out and categorize students' perceptions on the causes of their learning conditions and problems into different codes, which are short phrases being able to refine and classify the important information reflected in the transcriptions. To give an example:

Code	*Information*
Unawareness of the importance of Japanese	*"Japanese doesn't matter a lot, I think."* (Yan) *"I don't think I'll use Japanese in the workplace. So, I don't need to spend much time."* (Spencer) *"Learn it [Japanese] out of class? I have never thought of it... I can't see the necessity myself."* (Roger)

This investigation was anonymous and not associated with test scores, which guarantees its reliability.

4. Questionnaire Findings and Discussions

The questionnaire findings reveal the current condition of English majors' Japanese learning, covering the following three aspects: prominent learning motivations, learning time and habits, and learning difficulties.

4.1 Learning motivations

Table 1: Different Prominent Learning Motivations of the Respondents

Prominent learning motivations	Great interest in Japan & Japanese	For national graduate entrance exam	For JLPT test & job	For final exams & credits	No interest & unwilling to learn it
Number of students	10	10	19	49	12

The table above shows prominent learning motivations of the respondents.

The word "motivation" originated from "movere", a Latin verb representing "to move" (Lightbown & Spada, 2013), which can influence a learner's behaviour of and effort on language learning, and thus relate to his/her learning success. It can be defined as a process that sustains or avoids a goal-oriented activity (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008). Research concerning motivation has undergone four phases during the past five decades, with the emphasis changing from time to time, which include a) the social-psychological period (1959-1990), when Gardner and his associates dominated the area, b) the cognitive-situated period (the 1990s), when cognitive theories were integrated into educational psychology, c) the process-oriented period (since 2000), when Dörnyei, Ushioda and their colleagues developed an interest in motivational change, and d) the socio-dynamic period, when the situated complexity of L2 motivation with internal, social and contextual factors, and the use of "future possible selves" were considered (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011 as cited in Yung, 2013).

Self-determination theory (SDT) was employed to the current research. It was proposed by Deci & Ryan (1985), who hold the belief that motivation can be categorized into 3 in detail: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation, depending on the personal choice of an individual. Intrinsic motivation is related to doing an activity because of *"the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself"* (Ryan & Deci, 2000 p. 71) and is triggered by one's interest in the learning content itself, while extrinsic motivation is associated with "*the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome*" (Ryan & Deci, 2000 p. 71) and is triggered by external stimuli. As for amotivation, it means "*the state of lacking the intention to act*" (Ryan & Deci, 2000 p. 72).

Seen from the SDT theory, the prominent learning motivations of the respondents above can be further classified into three types:

Table 2: Further Classification of Respondents' Prominent Learning Motivations

Prominent learning motivations	Intrinsic motivation	Extrinsic motivation	Amotivation
Number of students	10	78	12

As can be seen from the data above, it is obvious that most students had extrinsic learning motivations, accounting for 78%. Except for those who showed negative attitudes (12%), only 10% of students were positive and internally had a passion for Japanese learning.

Discussions

The results of this investigation differ from the findings of Wang (2005), who did a quantitative research on the learning motivations of non-Japanese majors at Tsinghua University, Peking University and Renmin University of China. According to her research, students in these three universities mostly learnt Japanese out of interest and expected to improve themselves, which can be classified as intrinsic motivations. This difference, to some extent, reflects the utilitarian learning attitudes of students in the university in this research. In fact, if one does not learn a language with an initial interest, it will be hard for him or her to study deeply, let alone to achieve a lot.

4.2 Learning time and habits

This part is composed of two small parts: 1) time spent on Japanese learning after class each week; 2) students' after-class preview, review and application of Japanese.

4.2.1 Time spent on Japanese learning after class each week

This table below illustrates time students spent on Japanese after class each week.

Table 3: Time Students Spend on Japanese after Class Each Week

Weekly learning time	<1 hour	1-2 hours	2-3 hours	3-4 hours	>5 hours
Number of students	15	36	26	15	8

According to the statistics, only 8% of the respondents spent more than 5 hours, that is, more than 1 hour each working day on Japanese learning. 15% of the students learnt Japanese for 3-4 hours weekly. Students of these two proportions spent relatively much time on Japanese; their learning situations were comparatively optimistic. In addition, 26% of the students studied Japanese for 2-3 hours per week, which is acceptable. However, those who spent 1-2 hours or less each week occupy large proportions, which is hard to meet the corresponding learning requirements.

Discussions

The findings are not so ideal as what Jin (2014) discovered in a research study conducted in 2014, in which 87 undergraduate English students from Jilin, China were found enthusiastic about Japanese learning after class. A majority (45.6%) of the

students spent 0.5-1 hour daily on Japanese learning after class, while those who spent 1-2 hours daily reached 8.8% and two students allocated 2-3 hours every day.

As is known to all, there are no shortcuts to knowledge acquisition, especially language learning. Only by consolidation and repeated practice can one master a language and use it expertly. Without enough time and efforts, the learning outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

4.2.2 Students' after-class preview, review and application of Japanese

The findings show that 62% of students previewed and reviewed lessons arbitrarily and mainly coped with homework. 20% of students initiatively previewed lessons, summarized learning focuses and difficulties, thought over problems and consulted teachers in time. 18% of the subjects asserted that they seldom did previewing or reviewing and spent about 10 minutes looking through new words before class.

What is worth mentioning is that only 5 students tended to apply Japanese to daily communication, while the rest asserted that they did not use Japanese actively.

Discussions

This condition is similar to that mentioned in Wang's (2012) research, who did a survey among 80 students at a university in Guizhou, China, and found out students' negative attitude towards Japanese learning in and out of class. 35% of the respondents did not take homework seriously, and 30% even copied others' answers instead of finishing homework by themselves, which reveals students' problematic out-of-class learning attitudes.

As a matter of fact, the importance of a preview is self-evident. Only after sufficient preview can one get to the point in class instead of feeling at a loss. It is the same with a review. Only after thinking over what has been taught and solving problems in time can one lay a solid foundation, and construct a knowledge system for himself or herself. Otherwise, the result can be nothing but a vicious spiral.

4.3 Learning difficulties

The table below reflects the learning difficulties the respondents met during their learning process.

Table 4: Learning Difficulties of the Respondents

Learning difficulties	Introduction (Pronunciation and Intonation)	Vocabulary	Grammar
Number of students (overlapped)	69	94	65

As is shown in the table, almost all the respondents (94%) considered vocabulary learning a tough job. And those who had problems with pronunciation and intonation as well as grammar also accounted for large proportions; the percentages reached 69% and 65% respectively.

As for those who had difficulty in learning vocabularies, they had almost the same feeling: Japanese vocabulary was extremely hard to memorize. Meanwhile, when seeing a kanji (漢字), they usually could not think of its corresponding pronunciation. Instead, they needed to rely on the marked hiragana (平仮名). Meanwhile, their listening was not that ideal. They had trouble in keeping up with the recordings played on the classroom computer. Sometimes, a certain pronunciation seemed very familiar to them, but they were incapable of identifying the concrete word immediately.

In terms of the subjects who had trouble in understanding the introduction part (pronunciation and intonation), the Japanese Syllabary (五十音図) was difficult for them to learn by heart. Those who regarded grammar as a headache held the opinion that Japanese grammar system was not clear enough or even in chaos. There were too many points to remember; it was easy to mix up two similar ones.

Discussions

Those learning difficulties the respondents met were also discussed in other research studies. For instance, Zheng (2011) points out that the Japanese Syllabary (五十音図) is the first obstacle for students' Japanese learning. In light of her teaching experiences, at the very first, many students' were interested in and pinned great hopes on their Japanese learning. As time went by, however, many of them quit: the Japanese Syllabary (五十音図) was the first setback they needed to overcome, after which they also had to face a completely unfamiliar grammar system, not to mention the most complicated honorifics (敬語). In addition, according to Wei (2011), students often stated that vocabulary was the most challenging part in their Japanese learning: not only because the number was substantial, but also because it was easy to confuse one word with another.

As the old saying goes, "Well begun, half done". If one learns the ABC of Japanese smoothly, it will naturally boost his or her confidence without doubt. Instead, if one gets confused even at the very beginning, he or she will beat a retreat in the face of difficulty and feel reluctant. Additionally, Wilkins (1972, p111) points out that *"Without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed"*. Therefore, grammar is crucial and vocabulary cannot be underestimated either.

5. Interview Findings and Discussions

By means of coding, the researcher analyzed the interview transcriptions and tried to find out the reasons accounting for the above learning condition. It has been found that both subjective and objective reasons brought about students' poor motivations, inappropriate learning habits, and apparent learning difficulties reflected in Section 4.

5.1 Subjective reasons

5.1.1 Emotional resistance and discrimination

When asked "Why do you have poor motivations in Japanese learning?", "emotional resistance" and "discrimination" are keywords abstracted from the interview transcriptions. For example, Ivan stated,

"I don't like Japanese, maybe because of the historical reasons. They did many bad things to China during the World War II. (Ivan)

Similarly, Fred mentioned,

"The Japanese soldiers committed atrocities against the innocent Chinese people in the war, and the government hasn't apologized until today. I feel rather disgusted and that's why I dislike the Japanese language." (Fred)

Due to the atrocities Japanese soldiers committed against Chinese during the Anti-Japanese War, some students were hostile to Japanese and all things related to it, which naturally caused their emotional resistance to the Japanese language.

From Nancy's perspectives,

"As far as I know, Japan learnt a lot from China in ancient times, and I don't think they have their own culture." (Nancy)

Ben held similar points of view and said,

"You know there are many Chinese characters in Japanese. Where are they from? Chinese. They just copied the Chinese language and made a few changes by themselves. I think learning Chinese well is enough." (Ben)

Some respondents held the belief that China and Japan both belong to East Asian cultural circle and share similar cultures. Japanese culture was just a derivation or even a copy of Chinese culture. For instance, Japanese kanji (漢字) were created by imitating Chinese characters. These students were apt to be contemptuous of Japanese culture and denied the worth of the Japanese language. These two elements above gave rise to students' poor learning motivations.

Discussions

Students' emotional resistance and discrimination were also focused in Jiang's (2014) study. He mentioned that in modern history, the Sino-Japanese relationship is often tense and complex. The breakout of the World War II deeply hurt the friendship between Chinese and Japanese people, and even resulted in the hostility. Also, China and Japan are of profound historical origins. The Chinese culture has exerted great

influences on the Japanese culture, and has become part of it. These elements make Chinese students feel arrogant and superior, and hence undermine students' learning enthusiasm.

5.1.2 Unawareness of the importance of Japanese

When asked "Why don't you spend more time each week on Japanese learning after class?" and "Why don't you preview, review and apply Japanese more after class?", students' answers indicated their misunderstandings of the importance of Japanese. Yan's answer was a good example.

> *"As an English major, I should focus on English learning to prepare myself for a bright future. Japanese doesn't matter a lot, I think. I may not use it in the future, I suppose."*
>
> (Yan)

Spencer also added,

> *"Learning English well is enough for me. I disagree I'll use Japanese in the workplace. So, I don't need to spend much time."* (Spencer)

From where Betty stood, she asserted,

> *"I seldom review and preview Japanese, as I don't consider it necessary. I just need to learn Japanese in class and make preparations ahead of examinations.* (Betty)

Additionally, Roger's answer was also similar,

> *"Learn it [Japanese] out of class? I have never thought of it. It's only a subject in class. Though I know applying it after class may be helpful, yet I can't see the necessity myself."* (Roger)

As English majors, some students inclined to concentrate merely on English learning and realize the importance of English, ignoring the requirement of being multilingual in contemporary society and marginalize the Japanese language. That is why considerable students only spent 1-2 hours or less each week on Japanese learning, instead of forming a habit of previewing and reviewing lessons after class and using it to search for information, not to mention conducting communications on their own initiative.

Consequently, they were unable to follow the teachers in class and construct their own knowledge system, which contributed to the lack of a solid foundation and the vicious spiral.

Discussions

Qian and Xu (2002) conducted a questionnaire survey on 105 English major graduates in Shanghai, China. It was found that more than two thirds (64.76%) of the graduates regarded "second foreign languages" important (including "very important", "relatively important" and "as important as English"), demonstrating the significant status of "second foreign languages" and opposing the viewpoint that learning Japanese is useless.

5.1.3 Inappropriate learning methods

When asked "How do you usually learn Japanese? Can you give examples?", students' answers revealed their problematic learning methods. For example, Peter mentioned,

> *"There are too many different types of sentences in each lesson. I try my best but can hardly memorize all. I even copy the sentence patterns for several times. I find it really easy for me to forget what I have learnt before when I try to remember new knowledge."*
>
> (Peter)

In addition, Joanna added,

> *"I sometimes try to compare English vocabulary grammar with Japanese ones. However, they seem to be so different. For example, in English we say "beautiful flowers", but in Japanese it should be "きれいな花". A particle "な" should be added. I often forget to add "な", because in English it's not needed."*
>
> (Joanna)

It can be concluded that students were prone to learn Japanese by rote memorization rather than draw inferences about other cases from one instance and find the inherent relationship between new knowledge and what had been learnt before. Also, some students applied mechanically English knowledge (such as grammar) to Japanese learning, regardless of the huge difference between them, which brought about a negative transfer to interfere Japanese language learning. In fact, English belongs to Indo-European linguistic family, while Japanese is another story. These tendencies undermined their learning outcomes and hence made them feel Japanese learning is rather challenging.

Discussions

Students' inappropriate learning methods were also discussed in Miao's (2009) research. She discovered that some students remembered new words by rote memorization instead of putting them in a sentence context. Although they could memorize some words, they did not know how to use them. In the meantime, regarding grammar, students did not have a clear picture of knowledge in mind but just memorized each isolated sentence pattern -- they could not find the inherent

relationship between new and old knowledge. Their incorrect learning methods led to negative learning results, thus making them upset.

5.2 Objective reasons

Apart from these subjective reasons discussed above, some objective reasons also accounted for students' learning condition and problems.

5.2.1 Misallocation of time and class periods

Although English majors did not need to be busy with doing experiments and writing reports like science students, they still had many English courses to take and a lot of homework to do, like Cc stated,

> *"We in fact usually have 6 lessons each day on average, and spend 2-3 hours on assignment or homework daily."* (Cc)

Lack of time was also a problem for them. In addition to their heavy school load, some students were not good at managing and making use of their spare time. Some (e.g. Teddy) claimed that they seemed busy every day but their studies seemed not so efficient as expected:

> *"It seems I have many different things to do every day, but actually I do nothing.* (Teddy)

So, they found it hard to spare some time for Japanese after class.

In addition, this course lasts for four terms in duration. The teaching material is *Elementary Sino-Japanese Communication Standard Japanese (New Edition)* (People's Education Press and Mitsumura Tosho Publishing Co. Ltd., 2005). Theoretically, six periods should be spent on each lesson (Zhou & Sui, 2011). However, fours periods were spent actually in this university:

> *"We learn Japanese for 4 terms in Year 2 and Year 3. We have 4 periods each week and usually finish each lesson in a week [4 periods]."* (Joanna)

A discrepancy existed between teaching contents and the allocation of class periods, which made Japanese more challenging.

Discussions

The contradiction between heavy teaching load and insufficient teaching time was also found in other investigations (e.g. Chu, 2011; Zhou & Sui, 2011). For instance, Zhou and Sui (2011) pointed out that in Jiangsu Teachers' University of Technology, China, English major students also had to complete one lesson within four periods, which is

similar to the arrangement in the university in this research and resulted in the conflict between teaching content and time.

5.2.2 Disadvantages of the teaching material

As one of the best sellers among Japanese textbooks in China, *Elementary Sino-Japanese Communication Standard Japanese (New Edition)* (People's Education Press and Mitsumura Tosho Publishing Co. Ltd., 2005) has various strengths. For instance, it does not adopt the School Grammar System (学校文法), and therefore avoid the usage of obscure grammar terms, such as "連用形＋助動詞ます", "連用形＋助詞て" and "連用形＋助動詞た". Instead, they are called "動詞ます形", "動詞て形" and "動詞た形" respectively in this textbook to simplify the learning process and make it easier for learners to understand and remember.

However, this teaching material has inevitable weaknesses. For example, all the kanji (漢字) appearing in this book are marked with the corresponding hiragana (平仮名）which, to some extent, eliminates students' reading obstacles but at the same time gives birth to their dependence and laziness. For instance, Betty said,

> *"In the textbook, all the kanji (漢字) are marked with the corresponding hiragana (平仮名). I think it's intended to reduce readers' reading obstacles, which is convenient for us students. But I think each coin has two sides. I tend to rely much on the hiragana (平仮名) and feel I don't need to remember the pronunciation of each word. When the hiragana (平仮名) are hidden, I often can't pronounce each word exactly."* (Betty)

They counted too much on the marked hiragana (平仮名) and therefore could not pronounce kanji (漢字) exactly without them gradually and have difficulty in Japanese listening, as mentioned in Section 4.3.

Also, as for grammar, this textbook intends to have students memorize sentence patterns but not to explain or analyze in detail the grammar points in each sentence pattern, which is not good enough for students to do memory work on the basis of a thorough understanding. Violet stated,

> *"The textbook just gives us the sentence patterns and lets us remember. But it doesn't explain them in detail. I just can't master each sentence pattern well, because I don't understand why each word is arranged in such a sequence in the sentence.*" (Violet)

Meanwhile, verbs in the word list of the textbook are not marked as either intransitive or transitive verbs, which more or less confuses language learners, like Lily said,

> *"Actually, the distinction between intransitive and transitive verbs is important and difficult in Japanese. However, in this textbook, verbs in the word list are not marked as*

either intransitive or transitive. I often need to look them up in the dictionary. That's the weakness I suppose.   (Lily)

The disadvantages of the used textbook were not conducive to students' learning process, and hence contributed to the learning difficulties mentioned in Section 4.3.

Discussions

Since publication, *Elementary Sino-Japanese Communication Standard Japanese (New Edition)* (People's Education Press and Mitsumura Tosho Publishing Co. Ltd., 2005) has been praised and criticized at the same time. With its disadvantages elaborated by other educators (e.g. Cui, 2009; Lu, 2010; Song, 2016), many of those weaknesses mentioned in this research were also discussed in other research studies and found not beneficial for students' learning (e.g. Lu, 2010).

6. Implications

Among the problems reflected in this investigation, some can be solved with students' own efforts, while others cannot be dealt with temporarily due to the limitation of objective conditions. The author attempts to put forward some learning strategies so that the problems can be addressed accordingly.

6.1 Establishing correct learning mentality

Students should consciously realize that although the Japanese soldiers committed atrocities against Chinese during the Anti-Japanese War, it is the fault of Japanese Militarism. A large proportion of Japanese people are kind, innocent and not equivalent to Militarism. Henceforth, students should not adopt a hostile attitude towards Japan as well as the Japanese language.

Meanwhile, although China and Japan both belong to East Asian cultural circle and share culture similarities, yet Japanese culture is neither a total derivation nor a copy of Chinese culture. According to some Japanese ancient books, such as *Kojiki* (《古事記》) and *Nihon Shoki* (《日本書紀》), since Confucianism and Chinese characters were introduced to Japan in the early fifth century, great changes have taken place in the adopted Chinese characters in the Japanese writing systems and kanji (漢字) have new developments based on the imitation of Chinese characters (Miyake, 2003).

In addition, the Japanese also coined many neologisms using Chinese roots and morphology to translate European concepts. Many of these words were then imported into Chinese in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For example, "政治" (Politics) and "化学" (Chemistry) are words derived from Chinese roots. They were first created and used by the Japanese, and later borrowed into the Chinese language. This process can be regarded as a process of mutual learning.

Henceforth, when learning Japanese, students should try to abandon the side effects of history and racial dispute, and avoid the contemptuous and arrogant

psychology. Additionally, they should be aware of the important role the Japanese language plays in today's society.

6.2 Understanding the importance of Japanese learning

With the development of economic globalization in the past decades, the demand for Japanese-speaking talents has been increasing and an unprecedented upsurge of learning Japanese has appeared at tertiary education in China (Su, 2008, as cited in Han & Jiang, 2013). As is mentioned in Section 4.1.2, in a questionnaire survey among 105 English major graduates in Shanghai, China, nearly 65% of the graduates value the importance of "second foreign languages" (including "very important", "relatively important" and "as important as English") in light of their own working experiences (Qian & Xu, 2002), which signified their significant status and opposed the viewpoint that learning Japanese is useless.

As a consequence, attention should be given to the significance of Japanese for English majors. Students should spare time for Japanese learning out of class, preview and review lessons and apply what they have learnt to practice and try to use Japanese for the search of information and communication. In other words, Japanese study should be extended to out-of-class activities.

6.3 Pronunciation and intonation improvement

As is known to all, when students learn Japanese as beginners, the first barrier they need to tackle is The Japanese Syllabary (五十音図). Supposing that they study the manner of articulation of each kana (仮名) by looking into each mechanism organ as they learn English Phonetics, the possibility is that they will easily get confused and therefore, beat a retreat in the face of difficulty and feel reluctant. In fact, it is not very difficult for Chinese to learn Japanese pronunciation. The key point is imitation in accordance with the pronunciation tips introduced in the textbook. As for the graphemic of each kana (仮名), students can firstly try to figure out their origins and then memorize them through understanding. At the same time, they can make use of some common greeting expressions as well as lyrics of popular Japanese songs for repeated practice and consolidation, which was also supported by Li (2017). These methods can help boost students' confidence, arouse their curiosity and virtually increase the learning efficiency.

6.4 Vocabulary learning
6.4.1 Comparative memory work of pronunciation

As is known to all, Japanese vocabulary mainly consists of four parts, namely Chinese words or kango (漢語), native Japanese words or wago (和語), borrowed words or gaigarigo (外来語) and mixed words or konshugo (混種語). Chinese words are pronounced in accordance with on'yomi (音読み), which is also called sound (-based) reading or Sino-Japanese reading. It is the modern descendant of the Japanese approximation of the Chinese pronunciation of the character at the time it was

introduced. For instance, the Japanese word "問題" is pronounced as " mondai (もんだい) ", which is very close to the pronunciation of the Chinese word "问题". Borrowed words refer to those words that were introduced from Europe or America, such as the word "スポーツ". It sounds like "supootsu", and was borrowed from the English word "sports". So, "スポーツ" and "sports" share similar pronunciations.

As a result, when students memorize the pronunciations of Japanese vocabulary, especially Chinese words and borrowed words, it is suggested that they associate the words with their corresponding Chinese or English pronunciation and take advantage of positive transfer, which facilitates their learning.

6.4.2 Attaching equal importance to "sound", "form" and "meaning"

As is mentioned above in this paper, some students pointed out that when seeing a kanji (漢字), they usually could not think of its corresponding pronunciation immediately. Actually, this problem resulted from their inaccurate vocabulary learning method. That is to say, they ignored the memorization of pronunciation and they relied too much on the marked hiragana (平仮名) of each word. To take the word "急ぎます" as an example. When a Chinese sees the form of the word itself, it is easy for him or her to guess its meaning, which means "to hurry up". In consequence, many students tend to content themselves with only "understanding the meaning" and "knowing how to write" and therefore ignore "to figure out the pronunciation". "Dumb Japanese" happens naturally.

In order to solve this problem, students need to attach equal importance to the sound, form and meaning patterns of a word. Actually, dictation is an applicable and ideal way to test their familiarity with all the three patterns of a word. When they are doing a dictation, they first of all receive the pronunciation of a word, and need to react quickly to figure out what the word is. Then, they need to spell the word quickly and write down its meaning. Under this circumstance, students' mastery of the pronunciation, spelling and meaning of a word are all tested at the same time. Meanwhile, when students read the textbooks, they can consciously avoid looking at the marked hiragana (平仮名) of each word, so that they can know whether they are able to read each word correctly themselves without the help of the marked pronunciation, which also assists them in getting rid of their dependence and laziness.

6.5 Grammar learning

Unlike many Indo-European languages, such as English, Japanese sentence elements are marked with particles that identify their grammatical functions. And Japanese word order is classified as subject-object-verb. The verb must be placed at the end of a sentence and possibly followed by sentence-end particles. Henceforth, for English majors, the Japanese grammar system seems not clear enough or even in chaos. If they apply mechanically English grammar to Japanese learning, it will, without doubt, bring about negative transfer and interferes Japanese language learning.

In fact, Constructivism can be applied to students' Japanese grammar learning. It refers to a behaviour that students actively build or construct their own knowledge based on the interaction between their old and current knowledge, instead of waiting to be filled up with knowledge. It emphasizes students' initiatives. In other words, students should manufacture and reconstruct what they have already known in order to learn and explain what is new to them and solve new problems (Wu, 2013).

For example, the sentence patterns of Lessons 1,2 and 3 can all be classified as nominal predicate sentences and summarized as "A は B です". The only difference is that the "A" part can refer to persons, articles and places respectively: 私は学生です (I am a student); これは本です (This is a book.); ここはデパートです (This place is a department store). Also, the adjective predicate sentence patterns of Lesson 9 and 10 can also be elaborated as "A は B です". Students only need to replace the "B" part with adjectives: この山は高いです (This mountain is high); 彼はハンサムです (He is handsome). Similarly, when students learn verb transformations, they can also draw inferences about other cases from one instance, such as "動詞て形" and "動詞た形". They only need to replace "て" with "た" on the basis of "動詞て形", a form they have already mastered previously.

By comparing new grammar knowledge with what has been learnt before and finding their inherent relationship, students can construct their own grammar system and make use of positive transfer, which helps to ease the burden and benefit memorization.

6.6 Cultural awareness

Language is the carrier of culture, and a language reflects the cultural substances and values as well as the social identity of a country. So, culture learning can never be isolated from language learning. Without the cultural background, language learning can be very difficult to go deep. Compared with westerners, the Japanese people are relatively implicit, so the Japanese language is comparatively ambiguous and avoids straightforward expressions. Influenced by the western mode of thinking, English majors, more or less, are unaccustomed to implicit Japanese expressions. As a result, students should learn the customs of Japan and try to get used to the Japanese mode of thinking and if possible, to see the world as native speakers do, so that they can communicate in Japanese properly to achieve not only the linguistic competence but also the pragmatic or communicative competence. Infusing culture elements into Japanese teaching is also supported by other scholars, such as Du (2010) and Chu (2011).

6.7 Reference to supplementary teaching materials

As is discussed above, although *Elementary Sino-Japanese Communication Standard Japanese (New Edition)* (People's Education Press and Mitsumura Tosho Publishing Co. Ltd., 2005) has various strengths, its weaknesses cannot be neglected. To address this problem, students can refer to other supplementary teaching materials in their learning

process, such as *New Japanese* (Zhou and Chen, 2009). This textbook adopts the School Grammar System (学校文法) and some explanations look obscure and academic, but it explains some concepts more detailedly, which is beneficial for students to do memorization work on the basis of thorough understanding.

7. Conclusion

By means of qualitative and quantitative research at a university in Jiangsu, China, it is found that English majors' learning Japanese was somewhat problematic, including poor motivations, inappropriate learning habits, and some apparent learning difficulties. As a matter of fact, this situation resulted from both subjective elements (lack of learning interests and emotional resistance, unawareness of the importance of Japanese, inappropriate learning methods) and objective elements (misallocation of time and class periods, disadvantages of the teaching material). To cope with the problems and help students optimize their learning, the author tried to put forward learning strategies from students' point of view. Others, nevertheless, cannot be dealt with temporarily due to the limitation of objective conditions. Inevitably, this investigation has weaknesses itself. For instance, gender element was not discussed in this research.

Anyway, by conducting this investigation, the research gap (i.e. the lack of an overall survey on English majors' Japanese learning) has been fulfilled to some extent. Both students and teachers can have a relatively comprehensive understanding of learning Japanese as a second language for English majors. They can at the same time reflect on and optimize their own learning and teaching, in order to adapt themselves to the competitive society.

About the author

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