

Section A

Building on Existing Strengths and Previous Experience

Introduction



The idea behind this section is to exploit fully the undoubted knowledge of English and social strengths that Japanese learners bring with them to the

English language-learning classroom. Modern Japanese has quite a number of loanwords from English, for example, which give Japanese learners a ready-made vocabulary. Strategies such as memorisation and rote learning, which the Japanese educational tradition encourages, can also be exploited to good effect, as well as their aptitude for group or teamwork.

Loanwords

Rationale

Japanese is full of very common loanwords from English. The pronunciation of these words has been 'Japanised' so that it is often difficult for us to recognise them. Alongside the description of the activity is a list of loanwords you might like to use for this exercise.

This is a good, confidence-raising activity for a group of low-level learners, who have just arrived from Japan. It is very simple but effective. You can give them an 'instant vocabulary' by just activating these words and getting them to apply the rules of English, not Japanese pronunciation. It makes use of one of the strengths of the Japanese – their ability to work well in teams.

Activity

Class type: monolingual

Level: beginner-intermediate

Materials needed: a list of loanwords – one is provided here, lots of board pens

Preparation time: minimal

Safety/challenge: (●)

Time: 30-45 minutes

Skills: speaking, writing

Procedure

1. Tell the class that they know a lot of words in English already.
2. Elicit an example or two and write them on the board.

Safety and Challenge

- Put the class into teams of four or five for a competition. Give them a time limit, say five minutes, to write down as many Japanese words with roots in English as they can think of.
- Divide the board into four.
- When the time is up, get a representative from each group to come to the board and write up their words. They should all come to the board at the same time and write only their group's words. The winners are the team with most words.

The next stage to this is to get the students to 'translate' their words into English pronunciation. Again, you can do this as a competition. They will almost certainly need help to do it. You can follow it up with some pronunciation work from a pre-recorded wordlist.

Wordlist

kamera (camera)
supotsu-ka (sports car)
erebeta (Am. E elevator, Br. E. lift)
esukareta (escalator)
otobai (motorbike)
shatsu, waishatsu (shirt)
ji-pan (jeans – from 'jean-pants')
epuron (apron)
tepu-rekoda (tape-recorder)
terebi (TV)
rajio (radio)
maiku (microphone, mike)
sutereo (stereo)
beddo (bed – a western bed, not a futon)
kohi (coffee)
sandoitchi (sandwich)
bifuteki (steak)
meron (melon)
orenji (orange)
naifu (knife)

janbo-jetto (jumbo jet)
purezento (present)
depato (department store)
apato (apartment)
boifurendo (boyfriend)
garufurendo (girlfriend)

NB *kohi* is from Dutch and *bifuteki* is from French, but they are sufficiently close to English to work in this context.

Development

A possible follow-up to this for higher levels is to get the students to suggest Japanese words which should be incorporated into English. A possible way of introducing this is with the phrase, 'I can't find an English word or phrase which expresses x'. Again, this can be done as a competition in teams, with the students having to convince you to 'borrow' the words. The idea for this development exercise comes from *Dictation* by Rinvolucris and Davis.

Wordcloud

Rationale

Many Japanese people have an excellent visual memory and this activity makes great use of it. It is also light and great fun; the activity starts off away from language and then moves into it. This approach is one that can be effective with learners of all nationalities, but particularly with Japanese learners.

Activity

Class type: monolingual or multilingual

Level: any level

Materials needed: white/blackboard

Preparation time: minimal

Safety/challenge: (●)

Time: 40 minutes

Skills: using visual memory, vocabulary extension

Safety and Challenge

Procedure

1. Draw a set of six to eight pictures on a piece of paper. They might be objects from a vocabulary set – furniture, for example.
2. Copy them onto the board. Draw a curvy cloud shape around them. Give students one minute to look at them. Do not give any other instructions.
3. Wipe the pictures off the board, one picture at a time, checking back occasionally by pointing at a space and asking what it was (provide the vocabulary if necessary). Leave the shape of the cloud.
4. Give students paper and ask them to reproduce as many of the images as they can remember. They can do this in pairs or individually. Give them a time limit.
5. Suggest they walk round the room visiting others and looking at each other's papers to see what they have remembered. Tell them that they will be asked to try to reproduce the images.
6. When they are seated again, repeat the exercise using different pictures.
7. Ask if anyone has improved their performance. Tell them you will be doing a similar activity later on, but this time using language instead of images.

(This second stage need not be done immediately.)

8. Write up on the board vocabulary you have elicited, or vocabulary from a previous activity or lesson. This may be single words or phrases. Frame them with a cloud shape as before. Again, make sure you have a record of the shape of the cloud and the positions of the items within it.
9. Ask students: 'Who found it very easy and who found it very difficult?' Divide the class into two, pairing those students who found it hard with those who found it easy, and give them a few minutes to talk

(in Japanese if they wish). The task of the one who found it easy, is to examine their strategy and describe it to their partner, who should make mental or written notes of what they have been told. You could also ask for volunteers who found they enjoyed the exercise to form a panel to answer questions from the rest of the group. Seat them together, facing the class. (Some students feel safer sitting together in the circle with the rest of the group.)

10. Make a list of the different strategies people employed in the task. This can be made into a large, colourful poster for the wall as a visual reminder of the lesson and as the basis for subsequent lessons (see Development). Make notes for future reference. It can help to know, for example, that Shoko has an outstandingly good visual memory (as a high proportion of Japanese seem to) if she is struggling to understand something one day.

Development

Once you have introduced this activity 'frame' you can use it later:

- to introduce topics or language areas
- to recycle language
- as a warmer
- as a filler.

Dictate/Translate

Rationale

Dictation and translation are both types of exercise that Japanese students will be familiar with. Translation is an exercise that is not often used in the modern ELT classroom. However, at certain times it may be useful to get learners to reflect on the linguistic differences between their mother tongue and English. It also allows the students to show the teacher something!