

How to Teach Japanese Linguistics in English

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1. Purpose of this Paper

In 2018, I was in charge of a course called “Global Studies C.” Global studies are liberal arts courses offered by the Center for Language Education and International Programs, which are specialized lectures conducted in English. There are five global studies from “Global Studies A” to “Global Studies E,” and I was in charge of “Global Studies C.” Since teachers could decide course content, I gave lectures on my specialty in Japanese linguistics.

In the first semester, I gave the course on the Shibuya campus, and in the second semester, I gave it on the Hino campus. There were 21 students in the first semester and 17 in the second semester. Students conducted evaluations at the end of each semester, and student satisfaction was 4.5 in each class. Satisfaction is measured on a scale of 1 to 5, so the rating of 4.5 is not bad.

However, my English proficiency is not very high. It would be “B1” level by the CEFR standard. It is not easy for a teacher with B1 English proficiency to give lectures on one’s specialty in English. I managed to get through the English courses by organizing classes in the form of “giving a task first, and then explaining it.” In usual lectures, explanations are given first, followed by tasks such as exercises. The method I took was the opposite, and this type of teaching made it easier for me to lecture in English.

In this paper, I report on Global Studies C, which was conducted using the method of “giving a task first and then explaining it.”

2. Syllabus for Global Studies C

Global Studies C consists of 15 classes, with a syllabus as follows:

- Class 1: Case Particle
- Class 2: Case Particle and Construction
- Class 3: Focus Particle
- Class 4: Sentence-final Particle and Compound Particle
- Class 5: Causative
- Class 6: Potential and Passive
- Class 7: Negation, Tense, and Aspect
- Class 8: Modality

Class 9: Noun Modification and Continuous Modification

Class 10: Complex Sentences

Class 11: Final Presentation Explanation

Class 12: Word and Phrase 1

Class 13: Word and Phrase 2

Class 14: Word and Phrase 3

Class 15: Final Presentation by Students

Out of these 15 classes, grammar was covered in classes 1 to 10, and vocabulary was covered in classes 12 to 14. An explanation of students' final presentation was given in class 11, and students gave their final presentations in class 15.

Excluding the final presentation and its explanation, I gave 13 classes, of which there were 10 grammar classes and three vocabulary classes. Therefore, this paper focuses on how to teach Japanese grammar and explains how these classes were taught in English.

The grammar categories covered in the 10 classes are as follows: ① Case Particle, ② Construction, ③ Focus Particle, ④ Other Particles (Sentence-final Particle and Compound Particle), ⑤ Voice, ⑥ Negation, ⑦ Tense and Aspect, ⑧ Modality, ⑨ Noun Modification and Continuous Modification, and ⑩ Complex Sentences. The next section explains how these grammar categories were taught.

3. Class Method

Students were given tasks including sentences with two meanings. They learned the functions of Japanese grammatical morphemes by considering the sentences' two meanings. In sections 3.1. to 3.10., sentences with two meanings for each grammatical category are shown, and brief explanations on these sentences are provided.

3.1. Case Particle

The next nine sentences have two meanings. These were given to students as tasks to learn the functions of case particles. Japanese has nine case particles: が, を, に, へ, と, から, より, で, and まで.

- (1) あなたが好き。
- (2) トイレを探してください。
- (3) 妻には不満がある。
- (4) 試験の日は7月20日に変更された。

- (5) 私は恋人と戦う。
- (6) 私から花束を渡した。
- (7) 誰よりもキミが好き。
- (8) エレベーターで遊ばないでください。
- (9) トイレで困ったことのある留学生は多い。

Sentence (1) has two meanings: “I like you” and “You like me.” This is because “私が” can be read as both the subject and object. That is, “が” can mark both the subject and object. This is the function of “が,” which students can learn by considering the two meanings of Sentence (1).

Similarly, students can learn the function of “を” by considering the two meanings of Sentence (2). Also, they can learn the function of “に” from Sentences (3) and (4) and learn the function of “と” and “から” from Sentences (5) and (6), respectively. Further, they can learn “より” from Sentence (7) and learn “で” from Sentences (8) and (9).

3.2. Construction

The next five sentences have two meanings. These were given to students as tasks to learn the constructions of Japanese. The constructions of Japanese are closely related to the case particles shown in the previous section, because Japanese needs case particles and a verb to form a construction.

- (10) 眼鏡をかけるときれいに見える。
- (11) 先生に見えないようにした。
- (12) 山内先生、研究室に届いた本を入れておきました。
- (13) 絶対にジャイアンツに勝ってほしい。
- (14) 私には双子の弟がいる。

Sentence (10) has two meanings: “You can see things clearly with glasses” and “You look beautiful with glasses.” The verb “見える” forms the construction “(agent) に (object) が (manner) に見える。” In Sentence (10), “manner” is “きれい,” but “agent” and “object” are omitted. The fact there are two ways to complement the omitted “agent” and “object” is why Sentence (10) has two meanings. The first way of complementing is “(あなた) に (文字) がきれいに見える,” and the second way is “(人) に (あなた) がきれいに見える。” Students can learn about the construction formed by the verb “見える” by considering the two meanings of Sentence (10).

By considering the two meanings of Sentence (11), students can also learn about the construction that “見える” forms. From Sentence (12), they can learn the construction formed by “届く” and by “入れる” by understanding that “研究室に” can be related to both “届く” and “入れる.” From Sentence (13), they can learn the construction formed by “勝つ” and by “てほしい.” Sentence (14) makes students think about the construction formed by the noun “双子.”

3.3. Focus Particle

The next six sentences were given to students as tasks to learn the function of focus particles. Japanese has 14 focus particles: も, でも, さえ, すら, まで, だけ, のみ, ばかり, しか, こそ, など, なんか, くらい, and は.

- (15) この列車は東京まで止まりません。
- (16) 肉だけ食べちゃダメ!
- (17) 私だけ幸せになれない。
- (18) 用件のみを手短に話す。
- (19) 千円くらい持ってるよ。
- (20) 優しくなければ生きてはいけない。

Sentence (15) has two meanings: “This train will stop at the Tokyo station” and “This train will not stop at the Tokyo station, too! What an amazing train!” In the first meaning, “まで” is a case particle; however, in the second meaning, “まで” is a focus particle. This focus particle emphasizes the speaker’s emotion and adds a nuance of “to my surprise” to the sentence. By considering the two meanings of Sentence (15), students can learn about the focus particle “まで.”

Sentences (16) and (17) are to learn about “だけ,” Sentence (18) is to learn about “のみ,” Sentence (19) is to learn about “くらい,” and Sentence (20) is to learn about “は.” By considering the two meanings of each sentence, students learn that focus particles have a function of “showing information outside the sentence” in addition to “emphasizing emotions.” They also learn that focus particles “can be placed in various positions.”

3.4. Other Particles

The next four sentences were given to students as tasks to learn the function of sentence-final and compound particles. Sentence-final particles are ね, よ, か, な, ぞ, ぜ, わ, さ, etc. Compound particles are によって, について, に対して, にとって, etc.

- (21) おなかが出ています。
- (22) 今度こそ彼に負けるな。
- (23) 今日の授業は休講ですか。
- (24) 助動詞によってアクセントが変わる。

Sentence (21) has two meanings: “You have a belly” and “I can see your belly.” Interestingly, if you add the sentence-final particle “ね” to this sentence, it has the first meaning, and if you add the sentence-final particle “よ,” it has the second meaning. By knowing that, students can learn the functions of “ね” and “よ.”

Sentence (22) is for learning the function of the final particle “な.” Sentence (23) is for learning the function of the final particle “か,” and Sentence (24) is for learning the function of the compound particle “によって.”

3.5. Voice

The grammatical category of “voice” includes causative, potential, and passive. The following seven sentences are for learning voice:

- (25) 子供を留学に行かせた。
- (26) 子供にテレビを見させた。
- (27) 息子に話させてください。
- (28) アイスクリームを食べられた。
- (29) ビールは飲めません。
- (30) 会長に推薦されたんだよ。
- (31) 近くにいられると、恥ずかしいけど少しうれしい。

Sentence (25) has two meanings: “I made my son go to study abroad” and “I let my son go to study abroad.” In English, these two meanings are identified by the causative verbs “make” and “let”; however, Japanese has only one causative morpheme, which is “(さ)せる.” By thinking about the two meanings of this sentence, students learn that “(さ)せる” has a dual function. Similar to Sentence (25), Sentences (26) and (27) are to learn about the causative voice in Japanese.

Sentences (28) to (31) are to learn about “passive” or “possible” voice. In Japanese, the morpheme “(ら)れる” has both “passive” and “possible” functions.

3.6. Negation

The following three sentences are for learning about negation:

- (32) これ、水着じゃない。
- (33) 佐藤先生はインフルエンザではないかと思います。
- (34) 全部できなくても大丈夫！

Sentence (32) has two meanings: “This is not a swimsuit” and “This is a swimsuit, isn’t it?” In the first meaning, “じゃない” represents negation; however, in the second meaning, it represents a “request to confirm.” Thus, “じゃない” does not represent a negation in the second meaning. The same applies to “ではない” in Sentence (33).

In Sentence (34), two meanings arise because of the relationship between the adverb “全部” and the negative morpheme. Students learn about negation by considering the two meanings of these sentences.

3.7. Tense and Aspect

In the following, Sentence (35) is for learning tense, and Sentences (36) and (37) are for learning aspect.

- (35) お名前、何でした？
- (36) 娘はパジャマを着ています。
- (37) 子供が朝まで寝てくれない。

Sentence (35) has two meanings: “What was your name?” and “I heard your name a little while ago, but I forgot it. So, I’d like to ask you again. What is your name?” Namely, “た” does not represent the past in the second meaning.

Sentence (36) is for learning two functions of the Japanese aspect form “ている,” and Sentence (37) is for learning the difference between telic and atelic verbs.

3.8. Modality

In the following, Sentences (38) to (41) are to learn about modalities:

- (38) 中山先生はもっと食べたそうだ。
- (39) あの人は男のようだ。
- (40) あの人は男らしい。
- (41) 主役は彼女に決まっているよ。

Sentence (38) has two meanings: “Nakayama-sensei seems to want to eat more” and “I hear Nakayama-sensei ate more.” The function of “そうだ” is conjecture in the first meaning, whereas it is reporting in the second meaning.

Sentence (39) is for learning the function of “ようだ,” Sentence (40) is for learning the function of “らしい,” and Sentence (41) is for considering the meaning of “に決まっている.”

3.9. Noun Modification and Continuous Modification

The next six sentences are for learning about modification. The two types of modification are noun modification and continuous modification.

- (42) アイスクリームをあげた男の子
- (43) 女性が一緒にいて疲れる男性
- (44) 怖くてトイレに行けない話
- (45) 狭い家に住んでいる日本人は働き者だ。
- (46) とても高くて買えません。
- (47) あなたはダイエットのために必要な栄養もダイエットしていませんか？

Sentence (42) has two meanings: “the boy to whom I gave ice cream” and “the boy who gave ice cream to someone.” The modified noun “男の子” is the dative noun of the verb “あげる” in the first meaning, whereas it is subjective noun in the second meaning.

Similar to sentence (42), Sentences (43) to (45) are to learn about noun modification, whereas Sentences (46) and (47) are to learn about continuous modification.

3.10. Complex Sentence

The following six sentences are for learning about complex sentences:

- (48) アイスクリームがないのに気づかない。
- (49) ハンサムな男だけに魅力を感じる。
- (50) 彼の気分を悪くしないように断りました。
- (51) この薬を飲んでみる。
- (52) 結婚できないと誰もが心配する。
- (53) どこかから送ってきたと母が言っていた。

Sentence (48) has two meanings: “He doesn’t notice something though there is no ice cream.” and “He doesn’t notice that there is no ice cream.” “のに” is a conjunctive particle in the first meaning, whereas “の” in “のに” is a noun and “に” is a case particle in the second meaning. Thus, Sentence (48) is not a compound sentence in the second meaning. Sentences (49) to (53) are also to learn about compound sentences.

4. Conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning of this report, Global Studies C classes were conducted by “giving a task first and then explaining it.” In this course, the teacher did not have enough English ability and neither did the students. In such a situation, structuring the lecture by “giving a task first and then explaining it” was very effective.

For example, when giving a lecture on case particles, it is common to start with an explanation of case particles. However, the explanation at the beginning in English is difficult for both the teacher and students who are not good at English. Yet it is easier for the teacher to give tasks without providing explanation. Additionally, Japanese students who are not good at English can easily access it, because the task sentence is written in Japanese. Presenting the answer to the task—that is, presenting the two meanings of the sentence—is not very difficult for the teacher. Further, it is much easier to explain the task after that than to explain it at the beginning of the lecture.

The method of “giving a task first and then explaining it” would also be effective when conducting classes other than Japanese linguistics. I hope that teachers who, like me, are not good at English will refer to this report.