Country Note on the Topics for Breakout Session 6

JAPAN

Informal Language Learning: The Role of Media and ICT in Japan

By Takeshi Matsuda
Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo
mat@hirc.aoyama.ac.jp

Executive Summary

In terms of informal language learning, Japanese can easily get access to many kinds of resources with ICT. ICT has an impact on the educational industry with traditional media like broadcasting and publication. ICT is providing language learners with various types of options; web sites, mobile phones, and game machines as the means of learning. At the same time ICT is integrating learning media. This situation is a great help for busy Japanese learners, however an abundance of means does not necessarily ensure the success of teaching or learning.

1. Overall Situation

In Japan, the infrastructure needed for learning with ICT has already improved. In other words, 76% Japanese use their own mobile phone and over 80% of all households possess computers (Japan Information Processing Development Corporation 2007).As a result, people can utilize Internet and mobile phones literally 'anytime, anywhere' throughout the country.

This situation has affected Japanese learning behavior in the last decade. Alongside of the spread of Internet, alternative learning devices –digital TV set, laptop computer, mobile phone, i-pod, and portable game machines- have been added to traditional language learning media. These innovative new media have three major features in terms of learning.

1.1 Separation of Contents and Distribution

Conventional learning contents could be distributed through specific media. For example, a learner could read texts on paper, listen to voices from radio, and watch video on TV twenty years ago. By contrast, a present-day learner has some choices when he/she gets access to a certain learning content.

Interactivity

There was a distinct partition between learners and teachers in distance learning settings before digital age. Thanks to ICT, learners are not passive audience today. Many contents and tests develop interactivity that requires the learner to select from a list, slide a bar, or match boxes. Furthermore, the idea 'e-Learning 2.0' introduces the learner-centered learning activity or the active learner who conveys his/her message to teachers.

1.2 Borderless Circumstances

ICT took away various boarders in many ways and increased learners' opportunities to connect with resources. This feature is especially important for language learning because it is meaningful for learners to be in touch with authentic expressions. You can read articles of newspapers in the world; watch real university lectures on Open Courseware and You Tube.

Eventually, these features allow language learners to a number of measures to learn informally. More importantly, they enable learners to participate in other style of language learning activities than ever; for instance learn-by-doing activities with game machines and search usages with Electronic Performance Support System (EPSS). The impact of ICT is also influential in the educational industry with traditional media like broadcasting and publication.

2. Broadcasting: Edutainment and Media Mix

NHK, or Japan Broadcasting Corporation, provides both formal and informal language teaching programs via radio and television daily. Beside formal programs mainly aired for high school students, the nationwide public broadcaster is developing 40 informal programs.

Table2.1 Informal Language Learning Programs on NHK (as of Oct.2008)

Language		No. of Programs	Total Running Time/Week(min)	On-Demand Streaming	Digital Text
English	R	9	1770	3	5
	T	5	400	1	2
Chinese	R	2	420	-	1
	T	2	125	-	-
French	R	2	270	-	-
	T	1	50	-	-
Italian	R	2	270	-	-

	T	1	50	-	-
Korean	R	2	420	-	-
	T	1	50	-	-
Germany	R	2	270	-	-
	T	1	50	-	-
Spanish	R	2	270	-	-
	T	1	50	-	-
Other (incl. Japanese)	R	3	265	-	-
	T	4	145	-	-
Total (12 languages)	R	24	3955 (65h55min)	3	6
	T	16	920 (15h20min)	1	2

Note) R: Radio, T: Television, Except for 'Eigo de Shabera Night'

Most of them have web sites and their paper textbooks are available at almost all bookstores in Japan. Although there is no formal estimation of the numbers of learners through NHK's programs, circulation of a text reaches over half million in April when fiscal/school year starts. Among 12 languages, English outnumbers other languages by far and some English programs are supplied as on-demand streaming contents (table2.1).

Old programming habits have been changing in NHK partially due to the introduction and diffusion of ICT. For example, some English-language learning shows, in particular on TV, downplay grammar and translation in favor of entertainment for language learning.. In addition, a new media mix appears in an English learning program, "Little Charo". The novice level program adopts so called 'Trinity Learning Method' that is a blend of radio, television, and Internet. Learners can utilize self-completed text for radio program, watch animated drama on TV, and try English quizzes on special web site.

One of the background factors is digitalizing Japan's broadcasting systems. Analog TV broadcasting will be terminated in July 2011 and TV stations have to cope with the interactive nature of digital television. NHK is preparing for new educational deployment in digital age with the use of several pilot programs.

3. Games: Impact of Portable Machines

Although game machines meant the video game platform connected to television in the 20th century, many Japanese tend to regard potable consoles as ordinal

game machines nowadays. This shift has been occurred by the brisk sales of Nintendo-DS (DS) and PlayStation Portable (PSP) both released in 2004. The home-use gaming machine market continuously downscaled after the sales of hard/software hit a peak in 1997. However, as *Digital Content White Paper* (DCAJ 2008) points out, "Nintendo DS had changed the definition of game machines".

Figure3.1 Nintendo DS Lite (Source: Nintendo Web Site)

The new potable game machines are not used merely by kids neither mainly for role-playing nor shooting games any more. Their appearance resulted in the sales recovery (Figure3.2). DS and PSP have removed three barriers of older game machines; time, place, and users' generation while expanding their target users. People of all ages can enjoy playing games or learning languages by manipulating a game machine without special skills. You can witness a lot of business people learning English, Kanji (Chinese Characters) or other languages with DS or PSP on trains and buses in Japan.

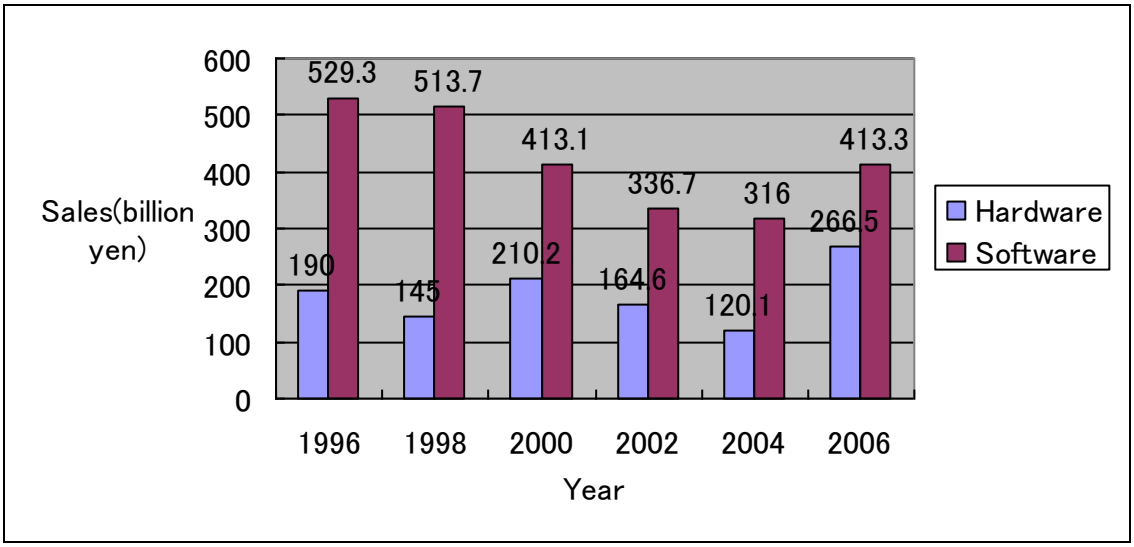

Figure3.2 Domestic Market of Home-use Game (Source: Dentsu Communication Institute 2008)

Table3.1 Software Sales Ranking 2006 (Source: Dentsu Communication Institute 2008)

Rank	Title (in Japanese)	Manufacturer	Machine	Nr. of Sales (Thousand)
1	New Super Mario Brothers （New スーパーマリオブラザーズ）	Nintendo	DS	3,840
2	Brain Age2: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day! （もっと脳を鍛える大人の DS トレーニング）	Nintendo	DS	3,292
3	Pokémon Diamond （ポケットモンスター ダイヤモンド）	Pokémon	DS	2,385
4	Animal Crossing: Wild World （おいでよ 動物の森）	Nintendo	DS	2,367
5	Final FantasyⅩⅡ（ファイナルファンタジーⅩⅡ）	Square Enix	PS2	2,252
6	Pokémon Perl （ポケットモンスター パール）	Pokémon	DS	1,976
7	Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day! （脳を鍛える大人の DS トレーニング）	Nintendo	DS	1,933
8	English Training: Progresses en anglais sans stresser* （英語が苦手な大人の DS トレーニング えいご漬け）	Nintendo	DS	1,662
9	Mario Kart DS （マリオカート DS）	Nintendo	DS	1,070
10	World Succor Winning Eleven 10 （ワールドサッカーウイニングイレブン１０）	Konami	PS2	1,030

Note) DS: Nintendo DS, PS2: PlayStation 2, *Name of French version

As is shown in Table 3.1, three learning/training programs became a million-seller in 2006 alone and one of them was English learning package. By the introduction of touch-screen technology, DS is suitable for dictation and writing in language learning. Meanwhile PSP was not designed as play-only model from the very beginning, which means it is a multi media payer of music, video and still pictures. On top of that, users can put memory stick into PSP. This makes data transfer between PSP and computer possible.

4. Podcasting: Integration of Mobile Devices

Alan Kay, one of the legendary computer scientists, conceived the Dynabook concept which defined the conceptual basics for laptop and tablet computers and E-books, and is the architect of the modern overlapping windowing graphical user interface (GUI). Because the Dynabook was conceived as an educational platform, Kay is considered to be one of the first researchers into mobile learning.

Figure4.1 iPhone 3G (Source: Apple iPhone Web Site)

Now that many mobile phones are equipped with net browser and GUI, it is not computers that have realized Kay's concept but phones correspond to Dynabook. Particularly, Apple's iPhone G3 seems to achieve the anything-goes world of learning except for watching one-segment broadcasting. According to Apple Stores' ranking, language learning contents have been highly placed on the list of downloaded videos or MP3 audio files in fact.

There are some differences between podcasting or other downloading scheme via Internet and software distribution for game machines, it is expected for mobile phones to put all kinds of mobile devices together in the near future, though.

5. Conclusions

ICT is providing language learners with various types of options to learning and at the same time integrating media. This situation is a great help for busy Japanese learners, however an abundance of means does not necessarily ensure the success of teaching or learning. Some challenges still remain unsolved for providers as well as learners; how to blend media and devices, how to motivate learners and how to make a profit.

Among a lot of tasks to study, motivation is the key aspect in informal learning because a learner can easily put off learning activities under 'anytime-anywhere' conditions. Motivational design and learner support with ICT might be issues of urgency.

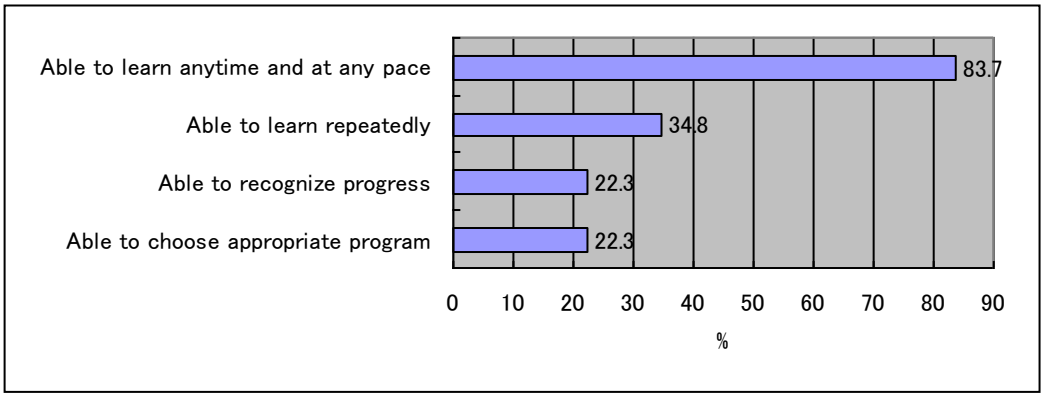

Figure5.1 Benefit of e-Learning (Source: e-Learning Consortium Japan 2008)

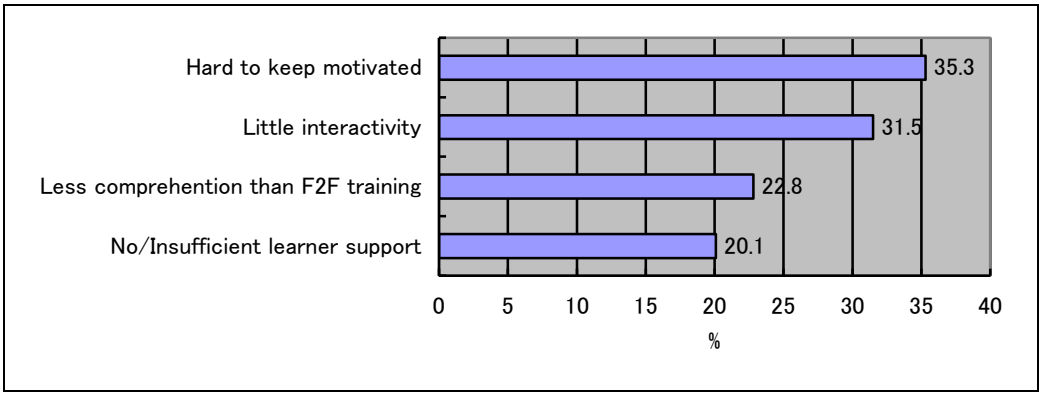

Figure5.2 Demerit of e-Learning (Source: e-Learning Consortium Japan 2008)

References

Dentsu Communication Institute. 2008. *A Research for Information and Media Society.* Diamond Press, Tokyo Japan

Digital Content Association of Japan. 2008. *Digital Content White Paper.* DCAJ, Tokyo Japan

Impress R&D. 2008. *Internet White Paper 2008*. Impress, Tokyo Japan

Japan Information Processing Development Corporation. 2007. *Informatization White Paper 2007*. Zoshindo, Osaka Japan

e-Learning Consortium Japan. 2008. *e-Learning White Paper 2008/2009.* Tokyo Denki University Press, Tokyo