Japanese as Foreign Language in European universities – new students and/or new teaching paradigm?

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Abstract

This paper discusses recent changes surrounding Japanese as Foreign Language (JFL) in Europe, specifically in France. These include changes in student numbers, profiles and expectations, as well as in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). These changes have not yet led to the necessary reconsideration of the appropriateness of current JFL programmes at universities. The scope of the problem is assessed by discussing current expectations and practices of JFL in the context of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The discussion demonstrates that expectations in JFL programmes are largely unrealistic and, hence, need to be changed. Finally, the paper discusses strategies through which current JFL teaching and learning practices can be improved. It is concluded that such considerations have to start with a decision as to whether JFL in Europe should continue training only specialists of Japanology or whether it also ought to teach students the linguistic skills necessary for daily work and life in Japan.

1. Introduction

The circumstances of teaching Japanese in French and European universities have clearly undergone major changes over the past decade. These changes are the result of a considerable increase in student numbers together with the diversification of students' expectations, motivations and abilities and, in addition, the revision of study programmes resulting from the various university reforms implemented in many European countries. A further factor is a new perception of the Japanese language on the part of the western public.

Yet, in this context, the main concern of teachers of Japanese today involves the balancing of (1) students' expectations and abilities, (2) the function of the university as an institution and the educational objectives

relating to the acquisition of foreign languages there, and (3) the educational methods employed to meet these objectives. It is in fact difficult to arrive at a clear understanding of these different elements for there is no clear-cut distinction between them. This constellation has ultimately created the rather paradoxical situation in which the growing popularity of the Japanese language among young people in France, and in the rest of Europe, is actually shaking the foundations of JFL (Japanese as Foreign Language) as it has been practised to date.

In this paper, I will address each of the three factors mentioned above, and, in using the example of Japanese language teaching in France, will try to show how they fit together or contradict each other. Most importantly, I will discuss how these elements interrelate with regard to the specific constraints and possibilities of JFL, and how, it seems to me, they are forcing us to challenge teaching practices in this discipline.

2. CHANGES IN THE PROFILE OF STUDENTS OF JAPANESE

The popularity of Japanese language programmes in France (and Europe) is clearly a product of the globalization and internationalization of our day, an influence which can be felt in every aspect of our societies, and the success of these programmes is the translation of this phenomenon in the domain of foreign language acquisition.

Yet there is a major paradox in the fact that, throughout the decade from 1995 to 2005, Japanese culture – or at least certain parts of Japanese culture that could be qualified as young, urban, mass-oriented, ordinary, transmitted by and involving new media – spread throughout the world. At the same time Japan was experiencing its worst economic and moral crisis since the end of the 1950s. How, in this context, has the public seeking to learn Japanese changed? And how have these changes come about?

The first observation I would like to make, regarding my home institution, the University of Toulouse-le Mirail, relates to the increasing diversity of JFL students. Student responses to two surveys I conducted in 2000 and 2005 revealed considerable diversification in the following areas: (1) educational background (according to their high school curriculum; in the French high school system, students elect to follow either a general – with a literary, scientific, or economic focus –, technological or professional stream), (2) age at the time of their first enrolment in a Japanese university course, and (3) the point in their educational career at which they started studying Japanese.

In 2000, students from the general high school stream (literary, economic and scientific streams combined) represented 84 percent of all

students of Japanese, with 45 percent coming from the literary stream.[1] In 2005, however, this group was reduced to only 61 percent, with 28 percent coming from the literary stream. At the same time, students from the technological and professional streams increased from 16 percent to 39 percent.

The age of students enrolling in their first year of Japanese also became much more diverse. In 2000, the vast majority of our students entered university straight out of high school. Thus age had not yet been identified as a relevant factor, and my 2000 survey did not ask for the students' age. Today, however, the age span is quite large. For example, amongst first-year students alone, ages ranged from 16 to 29, with more than 10 percent of all students for each year of age 18 to 23 in 2005.

Also new in the 2005 survey were questions asking which degrees had been obtained prior to taking up the study of Japanese, and whether students were enrolled in a dual degree programme. In 2000, these questions would have been relevant in only a few cases. Previous degrees and dual degree programmes would have been exceptions to the rule. Yet, in 2005, over 20 percent of all students had already obtained a degree (which fits with the diversification in ages discussed above), and 8 percent were enrolled in a second degree programme – typically their third or fourth year in another discipline.

Another important aspect of the students' background which changed significantly in this five-year period is the knowledge of the Japanese language acquired *before* they started university. At my university, for example, from 1991 up to around 1995–1996, very few, if any, students had already studied Japanese before enrolment. Starting in 1999, however, the proportion of students with an existing knowledge of Japanese began to increase, reaching 32 percent of all students in 2005. Although in most cases this prior knowledge is rudimentary, there are occasionally students who have already acquired solid bases. Most importantly, this increase shows that, for many young people, Japanese is no longer a strange and exotic language. Rather, they see it as just another foreign language, at least as one that is no more or less accessible than others, and which many of them start to study before university, sometimes on their own.

Finally, the last and most important point with regard to the changing profile of JFL students relates to their motivations and career goals, and to the time they plan to devote to the study of Japanese. In terms of the primary motivation for studying Japanese at university, 33 percent of

[1] Literary: 45 percent, followed by economic (21 percent), scientific (18 percent), technological (9 percent) and professional (7 percent).

students stated in 2000 that their motivation was linked to their career goals, while 36 percent said it was above all an interest in learning the Japanese language, and 14 percent referred to Japanese civilization and society as a source of motivation. The remaining 17 percent represented a mix of widely varying motivations, ranging from a passion for J-culture (for example, *manga*, *anime*, J-pop music), martial arts, or Japanese cinema to students who chose Japanese randomly or following a friend's lead. For a comparison at the international level, see Japan Foundation (2005: 6).

In 2005, the motivations of students in the first three years of undergraduate study were as follows (multiple responses allowed): only 13 percent were related to career goals, while 37 percent indicated an interest in the Japanese language itself, 34 percent were interested in Japanese civilization and society and 13 percent in J-culture, travel or had a personal interest. As these figures show, there was a reversal in motivations within this five-year period, with those linked to knowledge of Japanese civilization and society becoming more prevalent, while career-based motivations became less prominent.

In terms of career goals, in 2000, student responses varied widely, although the leading answers were: business work, with French or Japanese companies in Japan or France (23 percent), professions in translating (16 percent) and interpreting (14 percent), and teaching, of Japanese in France or French in Japan (10 percent). The responses in 2005, taken as a whole, show little change in this respect. They name the same four main professions: teaching (22 percent); sales and tourism (19 percent); translation (16 percent); and interpreting (10 percent). What has changed, however, is the number of students who say that they have *no idea* what type of job they may have in the future. In 2000, few if any students fell into this category, but by 2005 their number had increased to one in five students (21 percent). Again, we see that, contrary to its role in the past, Japanese has become a perfectly "normal language" – that is to say, a language like any other taught at university and which can be studied without connection to a specific professional goal.

It is also noteworthy that, in 2005, the only students who answered that they planned to go on doing research (1 percent) were those enrolled in a dual degree programme and who sought to study Japanese in connection with their work in another discipline, such as history or ethnology.

Finally, in terms of the time students planned to devote to the study of Japanese, the 2000 survey showed that all the students, even those in their first year, were well aware that acquiring skills in Japanese would require a long – even very long – period of study. Almost 30 percent expected to

spend more than five years studying the language. In 2005, this trend was even stronger, with 38 percent of first-year students planning to study Japanese for over five years. Yet, at the same time, 21 percent stated that they wished to spend no more than three years studying Japanese, and 18 percent said they did not know how to answer this question.

Furthermore, when asked how long they planned to study *at university*, 36 percent of first-year students said they would stop once they had received their "Licence" (three-year degree in the French system); 43 percent wished to complete a Master's course (five years of study); and 8 percent planned to go on to pursue a postgraduate degree; 9 percent said they did not know. These results appear to be mainly consistent with the responses to the previous question, except for the fact that they do seem to show that students clearly dissociate their study of Japanese from their studies at university. However, analysis of these results becomes more complex when we consider that, in response to a further question, 80 percent of these same first-year students wished to find a profession in which they could use their knowledge of Japanese – including, of course, most of those who planned to study Japanese for no more than three years!

To sum up, whereas ten or fifteen years ago students choosing to take up Japanese language studies planned to devote many years to its study and did so in connection with a specific professional or academic goal, today this holds true only for a small minority of students. Rather, JFL is now confronted with a new category of students which is characterized by the following traits:

(1) Japanese is an ordinary language to them, in other words, a language they may choose to study without a well-defined goal and without expecting it to present particular difficulties;
(2) they intend to be able to use their Japanese knowledge in a professional context after spending less than five or even less than three years studying it;
(3) they expect the university to train them accordingly, that is, to provide them in a short time with a level of proficiency in Japanese that will allow them to use the language in their work, even if this means continuing their study on their own after leaving university;
(4) even if they are hardworking and diligent, they do not have the same educational background or skills in university-level scholarship (knowing how to write papers, give presentations, take reading notes, and so on) as the students who chose to study Japanese in the past.

In fact, the only thing these new kinds of students seem to have in common with the previous ones is their interest in or "passion" for Japan, however irrational it may be.

To conclude this point, let me say that the diversification in the profiles of students of Japanese has of course been amplified by the fact that, between 2000 and 2005, the numbers of learners have dramatically increased in French universities. At my university, for example, the number of all Japanese language students rose from around 100 to over 350, representing a more than 250 percent increase in five years.

3. OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS OF JFL AT UNIVERSITY

What is – and what should be – the function of Japanese language teaching at university? This seemingly straightforward question actually proves difficult to answer. Are university courses in Japanese supposed to provide proficiency in the language or to prepare students for Japanese studies? Or, in a more ideal, or utopian, vision of things, are they supposed to do both – that is, make students proficient in the language *and* prepare them for Japanese studies? In other words, could the goal be to provide students with multi-faceted training: in the language, in general knowledge of Japan as a "subject", and also in a more specific aspect of this subject – an area of study which would later serve as their focus for research in Japanese studies? This solution, although undoubtedly very ambitious, certainly seems to make sense. After all, these are the goals in teaching other foreign languages (English, German, Spanish and so on) offered at university.

But in the case of Japanese, the question of time reveals the problematic side of such ambitions: how much time will we have to transmit all of this to the students? Three years – five years – eight years? Less or more? In fact, the real question is this: in how much, or how little, time can students in fact acquire such knowledge and skills? Moreover, if it is accepted, as it tacitly is in France, that Japanese studies are not possible without first mastering the Japanese language, how should this two- or really three-fold approach be organized, and according to what (reasonable) timeline?

We could discuss such questions in great detail, coming up with different answers based on various perspectives. In the present paper, however, I will content myself with discussing a few aspects which I see as truly pertinent to the issue at hand. My ideas have of course been based on the experience of teaching Japanese in France, but I think that these aspects are also relevant for other European countries.

The first aspect I would like to discuss here can be presented in the form of a question: "Is Japanese really a language like the others offered at university?"

Let us consider the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL henceforth), set up in 2001 by the European Commu-

nity as a starting point for our considerations. The CEFRL was created to serve as a basis or redefinition of the goals and methods for teaching foreign languages in Europe, intended to, at least, harmonize programmes and degrees. In terms of skills and know-how, this framework defines three user profiles and six levels of linguistic proficiency: A – Basic user (A1: Breakthrough; A2: Waystage); B– Independent user (B1: Threshold; B2: Vantage); C– Proficient user (C1: Effective Operational Proficiency; C2: Mastery) (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2001: 22–23).

For fear of straying too far from our subject here, I will limit my discussion to two remarks. I first wish to point out that, in establishing these communication-centric levels: *understanding, speaking and writing*, and in defining knowledge, and knowing how to do, how to be and how to learn, the CEFRL has been perfectly consistent with the expectations or demands of the students of Japanese arriving at university today. Moreover, and this is my second comment, this framework allows clear objectives in foreign language acquisition to be established for each stage in the education system. The French government, for example, decided in accordance with the CEFRL that, starting in 2005, the objectives to be reached, defined using this scale, would henceforth be as follows *for all students*:

– level A1 at the end of elementary school;
– level B1 at the end of mandatory schooling (i. e. eighth/ninth grade, at the age of 13/14 to 14/15 years);
– level B2 at the end of secondary school, in the general or professional curricula (Direction de l'Enseignement scolaire, Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche 2005).

What does this imply for JFL? For foreign languages in general, the level to be reached by the end of high school, thus, upon entry to university, is B2. In other words, we can consider level B2 as the minimum level required to undertake university-level study and start down the path leading to research. Yet in the case of Japanese, courses in French universities usually start from scratch, which means that the most urgent function of teaching the language at university is to allow students to acquire a B2 level of proficiency, so that they have the same "pre-research level" required for other languages. Now, this is where the problem starts, since the skills that qualify level B2 have been defined as follows:

B2: Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of

subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and independent disadvantages of various options (Council for Cultural Co-operation 2001: 24).

When broken down according to the various linguistic skills involved, this definition can be expressed as in the table below (Council for Cultural Co-operation: 26):

Tab. 1: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

Level B2	
Skill	**Content**
Understanding Listening	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.
Understanding Reading	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.
Speaking Spoken interaction	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.
Speaking Spoken production	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
Writing	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.

The question which arises in our context is thus how long it would take for the average European student, starting to learn Japanese as a true beginner, to acquire these linguistic skills. Could it reasonably be done in two years, in three years or in five years? Would this process allow time for training in the methodology of another discipline, such as that of Japanese studies? And if so, at what pace?

Set out in these terms, it seems to me that the answer to all these questions is "no". Unless we consider a perfect student who would spend all his time, even holidays, studying Japanese (in which case, if such a student existed, why would he or she need university to learn the language?), I think it is unrealistic to claim, or even imagine, that the knowledge covered in level B2 could be acquired for Japanese in less than five years (if five years is sufficient to start with). Needless to say, this would be even less likely in less than three years. In addition, we have to keep in mind that, if we compare Japanese with other foreign languages, this means that any possibility for research work would be jeopardized, because of a lack of linguistic proficiency. Thus, in answer to our question, Japanese is, in this sense, clearly not a language like the others widely taught at university.

In fact, if we examine the question of the function of teaching Japanese at university from this perspective, we realize that this function has never really been defined, except in idealized terms such as the following: 500 *kanji* in the first year, 500 *kanji* in second year, 1000 *kanji* in third year. Such a "programme" did, and still does, intend to bring beginning students up to the linguistic level of Japanese high school students, in particular in terms of their mastery of the written language. The mastery of written language as defined by such objectives is the level implicitly defined as the minimum required for undertaking research using documents in Japanese.

Although this goal, which is entirely theoretical, and probably entirely utopian as well, might have been satisfactory in the past, it seems to me that, in its current form, it is no longer appropriate (and I doubt that it ever really was in fact). I have always found it rather shocking, as an educator, that our university programmes in France, and elsewhere I assume, claim that in three years (which really only adds up to three six-month periods) students could be provided with a level of literacy in Japanese that Japanese, living in Japan and speaking the language from birth, need nine or twelve years to attain. It strikes me as ethically questionable to put forth as a "standard" something which will forever remain an exception, in other words, something which is in educational and intellectual terms impossible for the vast majority of students enrolling in these programmes, including those who are hard-working and focused.

The objective is so ambitious, and the knowledge and skills to be acquired are so vast, that in the end, a large majority of the students who receive their degrees are those who, by one means or another, have studied Japanese *before* coming to university. This observation is substantiated by the survey I carried out in Toulouse and, to an even greater extent, by a survey conducted at the University of Paris 7 in 2003.

In fact, my 2005 survey showed that in our university, the percentage of students having already studied Japanese *before* arriving at university increased with the year of study: 12.5 percent in first year, 45.5 percent in second year, 57 percent in fourth year. The survey at the University of Paris 7 produced even more impressive results, with the following percentages for first, second, third and fourth year students, respectively: 37.4 percent, 58.2 percent, 74.5 percent and 75 percent of participating students having started to study Japanese prior to their first Japanese language course at university (Ōshima 2005).

This increase in proportion clearly indicates that the teaching method in place obviously proceeds too fast, is too difficult and, most importantly, does not take into account the assimilation capabilities of true beginners. In fact, the Paris 7 survey shows that over 75 percent of the students who successfully completed their fourth year were those who had a head start and had studied Japanese before enrolling at university. In other words, with very little exaggeration, we could sum up the situation by saying that, at university, we only manage to provide a sufficient level in Japanese to students who have learned the language before.

It is evident that the current programmes are not realistic, and this cannot be explained simply by the fact that first-year students are a mixture of both true and false beginners. In my opinion, *re*-definition of these programmes in accordance with the changing profile of our students is insufficient. Rather, we need to define them to start with, something which has so far not been done, except in the case of training the few and highly specialized students of Japanese studies, which no longer corresponds to the vast majority of our students nor to the purpose of our institution. In fact, the framework of the European Union could well provide a solid basis for this task of defining coherent programmes.

It seems impossible to keep using the same extremely high and idealized proficiency level that is supposed to be attained by the end of the third or fourth year and, in so doing, blocking the advancement of students who fail to attain such goals, without asking whether this objective is actually attainable to students who have no previous experience of Japanese. We also need to truly ask ourselves what educational systems need to be set up in order to enable the majority of students, if they study properly, to attain this level. After all, this is what the description of our degree programmes promises to students. This element strikes me as essential, especially since the proclaimed objective of all university and institutional players, including on the Japanese side, is to draw ever-growing numbers of students into Japanese language programmes.

4. New methods or new materials?

The problems discussed above demand solutions that will be likely to involve both institutional and pedagogical aspects. Let us briefly consider the institutional aspects before discussing the pedagogical aspects in more detail.

On the institutional level, potential solutions that appear obvious, such as splitting true and false beginners into separate classes for the duration of the three- or five-year university programmes, appear rather unrealistic, since the cost of this type of initiative contradicts the budgetary restrictions currently imposed upon us.

In this area, I see a similarity between France and Germany, in that, for both countries, the majority of their Japanese learners are in the higher education system, as opposed to that in the other European country in which Japanese studies is a major discipline, the United Kingdom, where the situation is just the opposite. To be more precise, in France and Germany there are twice as many students of Japanese at the university level than at the primary and secondary school[2] levels; whereas in the United Kingdom there are three times as many Japanese learners at the primary and secondary school levels than in the higher education system.[3] What these figures imply is that, in the case of France and Germany, it is impossible to start Japanese language studies at university at any other level than beginner level. The United Kingdom, on the other hand, could, at least in theory, implement a general system for university-level Japanese which would offer a start at a higher level.

Even if it were possible to split up true and false beginners, in my opinion this would not resolve all the difficulties we are facing in the cases of France and Germany. There would still be the issue of realistically defining the content of the programmes and, to boot, there would be the issue of how and when to reunite these two groups. In addition, there would be the problem of whether students with no pre-university experience in Japanese would attain such a level of language proficiency.

By locking programmes into strict block scheduling that is the same for all languages, and by offering an academic year reduced to 25 or 26 weeks of classes, the university institution deprives the teaching system

[2] In 2003, France had 7,580 students of Japanese in the higher education system, compared to 3,710 at the primary and secondary school levels, and Germany had 6,783 and 2,008 respectively (Japan Foundation 2005: 20).

[3] In 2003, the United Kingdom had 3,636 students of Japanese in the higher education system, compared to 9,700 at the primary and secondary school levels (Japan Foundation 2005: 20).

of the consistency it needs. To be effective, the teaching of the Japanese language has to be spread over a longer learning period, with more regular classes, and it needs to include more hours of instruction.

In France, one possible solution could be to create a new degree programme which, in comparison to the LLCE and LEA concentrations (LLCE: Foreign Languages, Literature and Civilizations; and LEA: Applied Foreign Languages: Japanese + English + Economics/law/business administration) (Galan 2004: 305–330), would be devoted entirely to learning the Japanese language itself, with the class time in civilization replaced by additional linguistic training. Such language-centred courses would clearly meet a major demand among our current students. However, in addition to the fact that it could only be implemented after redefining the objectives of Japanese language teaching at university (that is, defining the need for exclusively linguistic teaching that is not tied to research), this system would also require extra class hours, which does not seem realistic in the current time of budgetary restrictions, characterized as it is by attempts to pool together or increasingly reduce the numbers of hours of instruction.

As institutional constraints are entirely out of our control and, although extremely important, beyond our influence, I will refrain here from developing these considerations further. Let me turn instead to the issue of pedagogy.

Reflection on how to go about teaching Japanese is actually quite recent in France. By definition, the vast majority of professors in French universities are researchers who have never been trained in teaching methods. Historically speaking, educational methodology has never really been a priority at universities, and in the specific case of Japanese, many professors teach the language in spite of the fact that there is no direct link to their area of scholarly specialization. Thus, for many teachers the extent of reflection on which their teaching approaches are based is simply that of reproducing the type of instruction they themselves had received as students.

In fact, the methodology for teaching Japanese in France is still based more on a romanticized notion of the teaching profession than on sound pedagogical considerations, for example, accounts of the specific features of the Japanese language and the actual abilities and needs of the students – of all the students, not just the best ones.

Nevertheless, there is the awareness today that pedagogical reflection is much needed and we can hope that improvements in current practices will be brought about in the mid- to long term. Yet, at the same time, various factors that complicate such reconsideration of teaching practices are also emerging. As pointed out above, these factors include the new

student profile, which goes hand in hand with new requirements, changes in terms of structure, university reforms, budgetary restrictions, and so on.

Today, it is tempting to link the question of Japanese teaching methods to the consideration of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) for education. For one thing, the issue of Japanese teaching methods came to the forefront in France at around the same time that ICT were becoming a central issue in pedagogical discussions in general. But the connection between the two issues also comes from the fact that ICT put their finger on problems we are facing, while appearing to be a tool that could, in some cases, provide a solution.

In this context setting a few things straight about ICT seems to be appropriate. It seems to me that there is some confusion surrounding ICT, and that they are sometimes presented in a fairly misleading light. After attending a number of conferences, such as those that were announced during the sessions on Japanese teaching at the EAJS symposium in the summer of 2005 in Vienna, and after reading a number of pedagogical texts on the *educational miracle* of ICT in the teaching of Japanese, I admit that many of the arguments presented have failed to convince me. In particular, I am sceptical about opinions presenting ICT as revolutionary and about the "new way of teaching" they are supposed to bring.

Such opinions lack knowledge of the history of education and pedagogy. This becomes most obvious when we are called upon to view multimedia tools as an "opportunity to rethink the traditionally accepted pedagogical concepts". In contrast to such opinions, it is simply not the case that ICT have suddenly enhanced our understanding that it is advantageous for learners to actively construct their knowledge rather than taking it in passively. These are issues already known since the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, if not before. ICT simply make it easier and less costly to use this type of constructivist pedagogical practice, although this of course depends on whether or not the multimedia tools available are truly suited to this type of project and to their public.

In my opinion, multimedia cannot really be considered as the vehicle of a "new way" of teaching. Nor, for that matter, does this technology in itself imply that the role of the teacher is redefined as a mere mediator – as certain defenders of ultraliberal economics would like to have us believe in their strictly commercial view of e-learning. In fact, the advantage offered by multimedia here is that it enables existing pedagogical principles to be applied, many of which have been around for a long time and have well proven their effectiveness in practice, but which are difficult to apply in the typical setting of our classes. These are principles such as adapting teaching to individual needs (level, rate of progression,

scheduling), feedback on the instruction given in the absence of the teacher, increasing time spent on exercises and practice, and so on. In all these areas, multimedia is an unmatched and unquestionably effective tool. It is in these areas that ICT can certainly provide solutions for more effective instruction and learning. This holds true in particular for handling diversity in classes. It seems that, for some teachers, multimedia could actually enable a readjustment of current practices, whereby class time could be used to provide additional explanations and clarification, practical exercises, and concrete, detailed discussion of various points (in grammar, writing, or reading, for instance) which have been previously studied individually by the students using appropriate multimedia applications.

One of the main problems with our current teaching methods, as I see it, is that, considering the volume of knowledge to be assimilated in view of the short duration of the academic year, nearly every class session requires that a great deal of new information is presented to the students in one block. They are then expected to assimilate this information by the following week. In other words, they are not offered a chance to re-apply or practice what they have learned, although it is well known in pedagogy that such practice time is essential for the assimilation of learned information. A point in case is the way *kanji* [Chinese characters] are taught in our JFL classes, compared to Japanese elementary schools. It is often overlooked that Japanese children learn the *kanji* not through a simple presentation of each sign in turn, but through dozens or even hundreds of hours of exercises and practice in both reading and writing. Yet our students are deprived of this time, as it is supposed to be part of their private study, even though they lack the necessary resources to manage such study on their own.

It seems strange that our pedagogy neglects this time for the assimilation of knowledge, so central to the learning process in Japan. This is even more true in view of the fact that the methods we use to teach Japanese reading and writing in France are more or less modelled on those used in Japanese schools (which are, granted, probably too mechanical, but that is another subject we will not go into here). It is not enough to "teach" the *kanji* for students to have them learned them. While everyone agrees on this, one nonetheless carries on as if this was not the teachers' responsibility. And the same could be said of the content covered in our classes in grammar and bi-directional translation, and so on.

However, let me once and for all establish the fact that an educational medium is not a pedagogy. This is an area in which the proponents of ICT in JFL are often disconcerting, and many multimedia-based methods that have been developed and are available on the market or offered by

various organizations merely use new materials without offering any real alternative to the established teaching methods. These materials include films, animation, and audiovisual elements, but it is rare to find tools designed to help students do more individual practice and personalized review exercises.

Yet, in my view, it is precisely through this latter type of tool that ICT could help resolve some of the problems we are facing today. Furthermore, as opposed to most of the multimedia methods now available, which claim to be both interactive and complete, it seems to me that, for university purposes, we should be developing media applications adapted to specifically defined uses and/or existing areas of instruction (language, literature, civilization), while also providing specialized supplementary materials designed to help students either consolidate or progress further in these areas. These materials would not be used in class, at least not solely. Rather, students would use them away from the university, at home, during holidays, whenever they wished, in order to practice and get a firmer grasp on what they have learned. In other words, such materials provide a means for students to construct their knowledge of the Japanese language more solidly and more independently.

This not only represents a potential solution to some of the most pressing problems in JFL, but it might actually be the only solution we have, considering both the current material circumstances (institutional and budgetary) in French universities today, and the types of difficulties our students are facing in studying the Japanese language.

5. Conclusion

To come back to my initial question, it can be concluded that the profile of students of Japanese has changed, and the pedagogical challenges we are facing have also changed, although probably to a lesser extent. With the arrival of large numbers of new kinds of students in Japanese language classes, the flaws or weaknesses in our teaching practices have been aggravated to the point that they can no longer be overlooked. However, it is my view that we should work on improving our current methods rather than reconstructing a radically new system of teaching Japanese at university.

There is, in fact, a great paradox in our current situation, in that most of our students now see Japanese as a language like any other foreign language and that Japanese language educators, too, carry on pretending that this is the case, whereas an objective and unrestrained assessment of the effectiveness of our current methods shows that Japanese simply

cannot be treated at university in the same way as other languages. An analysis of the Japanese language itself, and of how the Japanese succeed in mastering it, supports this. It is time we accept that this paradox is no longer viable.

To progress beyond this situation, two things are essential. Firstly, we need to define what the objective(s) of studying Japanese at university must be (and potentially do the same at the European level) and set up *realistic* programmes that take into account both the specific features of Japanese and the public concerned as well as the material constraints relating to teaching. Secondly, new technologies must be used, not in order to create a new teaching method, but rather in order to develop new tools enabling more personalized learning and a better response to the diversification of our students' expectations, learning levels, and capabilities.

The choice we are faced with is thus a very straightforward one. Either we continue treating Japanese as a language reserved for a small, select group of learners – a language the university offers solely for the purpose of training researchers in Japanology (*nihongaku*). But in this case, this outlook on JFL has to be *clearly stated* as such, to keep the wider public from flocking to a discipline that can only lead to disappointment, or even become an obstacle in the long-term, as it will be a dead-end. Or, on the other hand, along with training specialists in Japanese studies, we also set up an effective system for teaching Japanese to the wider public – a system which would, for example, allow students who completed the three- or five-year programme to attain a level of proficiency in the language sufficient *for daily work and life* in Japan. But this second option would require us to revise our programmes, our practices and our objectives, and particularly to define what exactly needs to be learned in order to live in Japan, and live there comfortably for any purpose other than research in Japanology.

In fact, it seems that many opportunities for the realization of this second option have already been missed, considering that the players in Japanese studies, that is, university administrations, European governments, and most of all the Japanese government and the Japan Foundation, seem to have clearly made the choice to draw more and more students to the discipline, ignoring the fact that this means that teaching practices must be altered. Thus, the real choice we are faced with is in fact the following: either the university accepts and shows that it is capable of implementing this new type of teaching programme, or the task will be given to other organizations outside the university system.

The consideration we must devote to all these issues is, I think, very similar to that needed within the Japanese school system if it is to succeed

in educating the children of immigrants, whose numbers are destined to rise dramatically in the coming years (as I have demonstrated in other works, for example Galan 2005). Of course, the larger question lurking behind each of these issues is: in this, the Asian Century, as some have declared the twenty-first century, what will be the status of the Japanese language, and what role will be played by Japan?

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