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Assessing Students Motivation to Learn the Japanese language and studies in the Age of Globalization

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Abstract

At different times there has been a strong interest among the people of different nations in learning Japanese studies, including the Japanese language. Taking into account the realities of modern global world with its focus on the intercultural communication, the problem of the assessment of motivating factors in learning the foreign language and working out the proper teaching methodologies is being raised by educators. That is especially true for Japanese studies, as the Japanese people historically have been known as one of the most “closed” nations. This research is mostly based on the results of answers to the questionnaire for the students of St. Petersburg State University (Russia). According to the results one may identify such motivational factors as strengthening political and economic relations between Japan and Russia and, thus, the increasing need for Japanese studies specialists; the increasing number of Japanese companies, as well as, joint Russian-Japanese ones, and targeting to work for it; continuing interest in Japan’s “pop-culture” phenomena; deepening cultural collaboration, such as making research on traditional art and translating literature etc. Although these factors correspond to some extent to 1990-s ones, it’s worth mentioning, that due to the new strategy in the foreign policy of Japan in the XXI century, there has been a trend to diversify and globalize relations with countries all over the world, providing an opportunity to its students and scholars to take part in different educational and research programs, concerning Japanese studies. Moreover, due to the realities of Globalization and Information Age, it has become easier to find out and apply for corresponding programs in other countries in order to cooperate with researchers abroad. Therefore, a variety of opportunities for international collaboration might also be a strong motivation for students to make a progress in their learning of Japanese studies.

Keywords: the Japanese language, Motivating factors in Learning, Intercultural communication, Age of Globalization

Introduction

The 21st century realities with its process of globalization have a significant impact on the features of the modern teaching methodologies. Taking into account the importance of the international collaboration for further development of political, economic, cultural relations between different countries, one should pay more attention to the problem of working out the appropriate methodology of teaching a foreign language at University. Historically, the foreign language skills have been used not only as a mean of making a conversation, but also as a “key” for better understanding the way of thinking and the specifics of mentality of the other people. The cross-cultural understanding, in its turn, may help to build up a constructive dialogue between nations.

In the case of the Japanese language, the above reasons are especially true, as the Japanese people at all times have been known as one of the most “closed” nations in the world. This factor caused a strong interest among the people of different nations in learning Japanese culture, including language.

1.1 Objectives

This paper first aims to point out the main motivating factors that students follow when they choose Japanese as a specialized one. At the same time, the problem of assessing motivation can be analyzed from two points of view: from the positions of students themselves and from the teacher’s position, which is meant to increase and regulate the motivation. Then it also aims to examine the Japanese language skills, which are the most requested at present time, according to students opinions. Eventually, understanding how students assess the meaning of studying the Japanese language, as well as its objectivity, is necessary to work out the right strategy of "new" teaching methodologies of the Japanese language as correctly as possible in the Age of Globalizations.

Methodology and Findings

Based on the above objectives, a questionnaire with the research questions was offered to the students of the 1-4th year of the Bachelor Program at the Faculty of Asian and African Studies (the Department of Japanese Studies) and the Faculty of International Relations of Saint-Petersburg State University (Russia).

Respondents were asked the following two questions:

Q1. What kind of motivation do the students follow to start learning the Japanese language, taking into account the realities of the modern world?

Q2. What foreign language skills might be most requested in the 21st century, i.e. in the period of Globalization and development of Information Communication Technology?

The results of the answers to the first question showed that 90 % of respondents share an opinion, that the main motivating factor to study the Japanese language might be the desire to work for Japanese companies, carrying out their activities, either in Russia or in Japan. It should be noted that such motivation is based on the growing importance of the economic issue in the development of Russian-Japanese relations over the past decade. Indeed, since the early 2000's there has been a significant increase in the number of representative offices in Russia of such famous Japanese corporations and companies as Sumitomo, Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Toyota, Nissan, Toshiba etc.

Moreover, in conditions of rapid development and introduction of new technologies in the beginning of the XXI century, for example, digital technologies or robotics, students are increasingly interested in the country, which has approved itself as the world's leading producer of such products. Therefore, the opportunity to "become a part" of Japanese companies specializing in the industrial and technological spheres is also may be a strong motivation.

Then 70% of respondents consider that the important motivating factor might be the everlasting interest in Japanese culture. Moreover, it is worth noting that as the “Japanese culture” students mean not only the worldwide popular phenomenon of Japanese "pop culture", which reached its boom in the 1990s and continues up to nowadays, but also the traditional culture, including classical Japanese literature. Traditionally, a large number of students are interested in the ability to read Japanese comics "manga" and watch "anime" cartoons in original language, that allows getting learned more about the features of spoken language. At the same time, it is noteworthy that the interest of the younger generation in the work on

translating and researching the cultural monuments of the past of Japan is growing again, due to its uniqueness. Thus, the cultural factor has not been losing its motivating power.

It is quite natural that the strengthening and intensifying the political dialogue between the governments of Japan and Russia turned to be another reason to study Japanese for about 40% of respondents.

The main argument at this point is the possibility of doing diplomatic activity on Japanese-Russian relations issue. According to the respondents, maintaining a dialogue in the native language of the partners can greatly accelerate the process of political rapprochement between the two parties, especially in the face of unresolved problems (for example, the territorial dispute over the South Kurils). Moreover, it also contributes to a partial removal of barriers existing due to the cultural and mentality difference between the people of different nations, since it is known that the study of any foreign language, especially Japanese, helps much for understanding the way of thinking of other people.

It is also necessary to pay attention to one more motivating factor, although less marked by students (only 10% of respondents), but not less important, that is: the increasing number of opportunities for participation in international training and fellowship programs. Over the past 7-10 years, such programs have been actively implemented to diversify international cooperation between higher education institutions of various countries, in particular, between Japanese and Russian universities.

It is known that participation in international training programs contributes significantly to getting new academic contacts, figuring out new joint researches, as well as building up an international professional communication, which is extremely important in the age of globalization. Consequently, for students, as for future specialists, such the opportunities might be very useful, and, consequently, can be seen as a strong motivation to achieve high results in the study of Japanese or any other foreign language.

As for the results of the second question concerning the language skills, the answers can be classified as follows:

1) The most important one is the skill of spoken language, as full communication is impossible without it;

2) The skill of conducting (writing) business correspondence is necessary in any professional sphere. The emphasis is done on the correct use of polite forms of speech in Japanese;

3) Interpretation and translation skills are necessary for all spheres of professional activity. Thus, learning the specialized terminology is of high importance.

4) Following the realities of the modern globalized society, the ability to operate properly with the information space in a foreign language, i.e. the ability to find information quickly in a foreign language by keywords or request formulated correctly, and check the reliability of sources, etc. .;

5) Despite the ongoing developments in the field of practical implementation of automatic translators, such aspects as, for example, fiction literature translation still depends much on the human ability.

6) Skills of reading and writing Japanese characters may be necessary not only for the comprehensive studying the language, but also for the possibility of a "simplified" study of the Chinese language, which is becoming more and more widespread around the world.

Discussion

Taking into account the above opinions of students, one may conclude that the study and teaching of the Japanese language require a comprehensive approach. It is the task for teachers to improve the teaching methods constantly for various aspects of the language.

Usually the practical course on the Japanese language is divided into several aspects such as: “Japanese writing”, “Japanese Grammar”, “Spoken language”, “The Japanese media”, “Translation of Japanese Fiction”, “Historical and Modern Historical Text” etc. Learning the language in the form of different aspects is finally aimed for the students can acquire the skills that can be applied in various fields of professional activity: research, education, diplomacy, translation, business, art and cultural activities etc.

The problem of the methodology of teaching a foreign language considering the ever-changing realities of the modern globalized world is very important and actual. Constant changes in political, economic, scientific and technical situation have a great influence on a lexico-phraseological language base of the texts on the topics mentioned above.

The printed media is one of the most important means of information dissemination, and consequently, the formation of reality in the mind of common people. The media has a difficult task of prioritizing certain words or events. Thus, the press can be considered as a kind of mirror of political, economic, cultural, scientific and technical life of the society (Ibrahim, 2016).

For Japan, this statement is especially true, since there has been a long tradition of determination of the character of the year and making the lists of the most frequently used popular words (jp. *ryu:ko:go*). The study of annual changes in these lists makes it possible to imagine a clear picture of the changes in the social and political life of Japan over a period of time (Ibrahim, 2016).

The study of such phenomena as "popular words" and neologisms in Japanese plays a significant role in the work on translating texts of various subjects, including fiction, as well as in acquiring the skills of verbal communication with native speakers.

Such subject as the “Modern Historical Text” provides reading and working with the texts on historical issues written in modern Japanese. The content of the research texts covers, mainly, a wide range of problems in the history of Japan, and world history, as well. One of the most important points of teaching the aspect is to work on translation of documents, such as treaties, joint statements, agreements, laws, text of constitutions etc. The case is that such documents have a certain lexical and grammatical base on which documentation is being drawn up to the present day (Lelenkova, 2016).

All these factors explain the actuality and importance of studying the "Japanese Media" and "The Modern Historical Text".

Reading and translation a fiction is another aspect, which takes an important place not only in the teaching of a foreign language, but also in daily life as one of the means of getting to know other cultures. It is quite natural, when the plot of the fiction is put in the context of the everyday life realities that is customs, people’s behavior in various situations, the use of specific words and expressions. One of the problems of teaching the translation of fiction is that the bare knowledge of a foreign language is not enough for an adequate translation. It’s also necessary to understand the cultural, historical and other contexts.

1.1 Recommendations

While studying the aspects mentioned above, it is almost impossible to rely on certain teaching materials completely, since they quickly become out-of-date. In this regard, the teachers of Japanese have to teach students how to work properly with texts of electronic and printed media and original historical research, while using auxiliary sources, including Internet resources, to analyze information and work with lexical and phraseological material both in Japanese and in their own language. It allows to compare the terms and expressions in both languages, and, to develop a terminology base.

A separate stage in the study is the lexical-semantic and grammatical analysis of the text, on the basis of which the students can make the thematic glossaries to understand the contextual connection between lexical units (Ibrahim, 2016).

In order to avoid inaccuracies in translating definite terms and concepts, it is very important to develop the skills of conceptual translation. However, this aim can not be achieved without further study of historical and modern society realities. This is the goal of comparative study and analysis of materials in both native and foreign languages (Borisova, Lelenkova, 2017).

However, for the development of a more complete understanding of the language, having just lectures and practical exercises is not enough. In addition one can use the news reports, documentaries or movies, etc. This type of training contributes to the development of listening and comprehensive skills. Moreover, the visual comprehension makes it possible to guess a proper interpretation according to the context, and, by all means, contributes much in getting familiar with the realities of the foreign people's life.

Interactive lessons using modern technologies are playing the more and more important role in teaching methods as they allow explaining the new material in an easy and accessible way. An explanation in the form of, for example, the presentation using a variety of animation effects is more vivid and memorable. Nowadays, the number of different types of multinational online seminars and conferences is constantly increasing recently. It is known that having "live communication" with native speakers helps "to switch on" the so-called "theoretical memory" i.e. the lexical and grammatical base that has been learned, but was not used in practice. The thematic discussions contribute to making an informative dialogue that encourages the exchange of views. Thus, students acquire the basic skills of speaking and making reports, as well as holding various discussions in a foreign language.

In the study and teaching of the Japanese language, one cannot also ignore the fact of widely using loan words or borrowings, the so-called *gairaigo*. At present we are witnessing a new wave of borrowings and loan expressions. The processes of globalization and the worldwide Internet play a leading role in its spreading in its practical usage in Japanese.

Moreover, there has been an increased international cooperation among many countries in different regions of the world during the past decade. Therefore, new political and economic organizations and associations have been formed. Thus, the need in adoption of common designations of different realities of the integration process is becoming evident. For this reason, a kind of the universal terminology base is being created, mostly based on the English language. Such a renewed terminology base, is being gradually accepted in other languages. As a result, the process of negotiating and business dealing between people of different nations has been significantly simplified (Borisova, Lelenkova, 2017). That is the reason why, while teaching a foreign language, one should pay a special attention to the training of translation skills, using as much the renewed terminology as possible.

Working on a translation of fiction text means philological comprehension of the text, understanding of stylistic factors of linguistic expression etc. It is almost impossible to translate correctly the idea of a foreign author without knowing the linguistic features (phraseological units, fixed expressions, idioms, speech styles (official, courtesy, familiarity, vulgarism), special features of male and female way of speaking, proper and geographical names etc.). It is assumed that a professional translator should not only be proficient in a foreign language, but also be sufficiently erudite in the field of history, ethnography, culture, geography, as well as in specifics of daily routine or social life of the Japanese people etc.

Thus, working with a fiction text can be used not only as a means of learning a foreign language, but also as an important tool for understanding the culture and mentality of other peoples.

However, while teaching any of the aspects, along with using complex approach in teaching methodologies, educators should also point out their research problems and to share his or her personal experience, as it may be helpful to making the process of education more effective.

Conclusion

To conclude, taking into account the modern realities of globalization and building up multilateral relations, studying the foreign language is of high importance in order to get familiar with and understand the socio-cultural characteristics of the people of other countries. The problem of assessment of motivating factors in the study of any of foreign languages is of high importance for it helps to develop new concepts in teaching methodologies. In the case of the Japanese language the comprehensive approach to its learning and teaching is ultimately aimed at acquiring language skills that could be applied in various fields of professional activity.

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