

Japanese language curriculum unit based on Japanese folk tales using hypermedia software connected to computer networks

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Abstract:

Using in the classroom narratives drawn from oral traditions is an effective means to teach a foreign language. Since stories that come out of oral tradition tend to contain many repetitions, they provide rich cultural references and include the use of colloquial speech and formulas, thus, they offer excellent ways to learn a language. Folk narratives are relatively short and, thus can be easily adapted for use in an hour-long class.

Electronic media that have the capability of linking text, voice and images can integrate the spoken and written elements of folk tales. The use of hypermedia and the use of folk tales will support to enhance students' cognition and develop independent thinking.

In this chapter, I would like to show how folk tales can be used in the development teaching materials. I would like to recommend using hypermedia computer program so that a story in the curriculum can be accompanied by visual images and audio. Visual images on the screen can enhance the students' understanding. I will present a part of lesson plan using a folk tale, Peach Boy together with hypertext for the purpose of teaching Japanese.

1. Introduction

Today foreign language teachers focus on developing students' oral skills to build their 'communicative competence.' Therefore, they pay relatively little attention to developing literacy skills and they have virtually dismissed the traditional use of imaginative literature from the classroom. Brian V. Street in Literacy Theory and Practice suggests that methods should be developed for teaching literacy that take into account a whole approach to the use of language, going beyond the teaching of phonetics and technical skills. For example, learning material could be created by the students themselves using narratives drawn from oral traditions.

Among a number of advantages of using them in the classroom, folk narratives are relatively short and, thus can be easily adapted for use in an hour-long class. Since stories that come out of oral tradition tend to contain many repetitions, they provide rich cultural references and include the use of colloquial speech and, thus, offer excellent language models. The following summarizes the advantages of using folk stories in teaching foreign languages.

1. Folk stories include oral features such as repetitions which help students memorize the use of colloquial speech and formulas.
2. They provide a moral education.
3. Students can learn about the culture and customs of their own country and other countries, which may increase their interest to learn.
4. Vocabulary exercises can be provided using the actual text of the story.

5. Folk narratives are relatively short and, thus can be easily adapted for use in an hour-long class.

In this paper, I will present a lesson plan using a folk tale, Peach Boy (Momotaro) together with hypertext for the purpose of teaching Japanese. I will also introduce what tools teachers could use in order to enhance understanding and learning. Visual imagery is an important feature in a curriculum based on stories. I use a Hypermedia computer program (audio, video, text, illustrations, etc.) so that a story in the curriculum can be accompanied by visual images and audio.

2. Setting

This lesson plan is suitable for high intermediate students of Japanese. It takes place in the computer lab and each student has the exclusive use of a PC. The teacher has already prepared a teaching software with a home page. Students should know how to use the Internet, a computer network and how to send voice and e-mail messages to the teacher.

3. Story structure

In the original motif of "Peach Boy" (Momotaro) is a smart and brave boy who fought against many giants. One of the story's goals is to teach readers to repay a person's kindness, and that endurance and bravery mean not to give up even in the face of difficulties. Momotaro finally killed the giants, but could not have done so without the help of a monkey, a spotted dog and a peasant. He obtained their help by giving them a dumpling to eat. This story's happy ending should encourage readers to find a smart solution to overcome difficulties. This story presents polarities in character (the good boy vs. the bad giants), permitting the readers to comprehend easily the difference between the two. The students decide who they want to be by projecting themselves into one of the characters.

I also would like to recommend using another version of the story partly because the students would already know some of the vocabulary. The other version of "Peach Boy" that I will also use in the classroom is very different from the original story. In this version of the story, Momotaro is not a hero or a villain, but rather he is described as a common person. This tale tells readers that we are not always rewarded for our labor. Thus, while the story is entertaining, it enlightens readers about themselves and fosters their personality development.

"Peach Boy" is full of formulaic speech and repetitions. I will use the two versions (see Appendix) with their differences and similarities to exploit the repetitions and to build new vocabulary and formulaic expression such as "Once upon a time" and "one day".

4. Altering the stories

We can provide alternatives to many of the words within the actual text of the story. Such parallel constructions may be also an aid to speech

production, since the repeated construction can be uttered automatically while the speaker plans new information to insert in the available slot as follows.

- (1) ももたろうが 歩いていると、途中で ぶち犬に出会った
 ももたろうとぶち犬が 歩いていると、途中で 猿に 出会った
 ももたろうとぶち犬ときじと猿が 歩いていると、途中で きじに 出会った
- (1) Momotaro **kept on walking and soon he met** a spotted dog
 Momotaro and the spotted dog a monkey.
 Momotaro and the spotted and the monkey a peasant

- (2) すると ぶち犬が 御供していいか尋ねた。 それで、ももたろうは、
 すると 猿が 御供していいか尋ねた。 それで、ももたろうは、
 すると きじが 御供していいか尋ねた。 それで、ももたろうは、
- (2) Then the spotted dog **asked if he could go with them. So Momotaro gave**
 the monkey
 the peasant

ぶち犬に きびだんごをやって、 ぶち犬を 連れて行くことにした。
 猿に きびだんごをやって、 猿を 連れて行くことにした。
 きじに きびだんごをやって、 きじを 連れて行くことにした。
 the spotted dog **a dumpling and let** the spotted dog **come with them.**
 the monkey the monkey
 the peasant the peasant

5. Visual imagery

Users of hypermedia can click on an icon to play an audio or video clip may be played, or clip a word in the text and another page explaining more about that word/ phrase will appear. Two main advantage of hypermedia are: Information is displayed easily and nicely, and access to information is made simple. Students can access the home page by using a start button. A help button or hypertext function can help them with using the software (if necessary, help for interpretation of the story should be provided: this is one of the most powerful advantages of using hypermedia).

In the story, Momotaro, the main character, tries to seek assistance three times, first from a dog, then from a monkey and, finally from a peasant. These scenes are interesting points in the story. On the screen, the students see Momotaro as he starts his travel to Onigashima (Ogre Island) and meets a dog. The dog asks Momotaro and they converse;

犬： 「腰につけたものはなんでござる」
 The dog: "What are you carrying in your bag?"

ももたろう： 「これは、日本一のきびだんご」
 Momotaro: "This is the best dumpling in Japan."

At this moment, the computer screen shows two images; one of Momotaro and the dog marching to Ogre Island, and the other of both of them eating the dumpling. Then the computer may ask the students to click

on an icon and complete the story. These images can thus provide an outline based on which students can write their own story. After students choose an image to continue their story, the computer asks them to write the text or to tell their story aloud by using prepared phrases and some words displayed on the screen. It is very easy to read or hear stories created in this way. I would recommend using an interactive software that is connected to the web; then, students can also read and hear the stories which were created by other students on the web via homepages. It is also possible to ask students to pick their favorite background music and have them record their story-telling. These sound effects make students feel that their own story looks like an actual animation that was produced in a studio. Such an experience can enhance students' autonomy. They can also post their opinions or comments on the web through the network.

In the following section, I will briefly explain the functions of the teaching software.

Table 1: Functions of the teaching software

| Functions | Feature | Purpose |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Voice commander | Voice recognition based tool prompting the students to speak to the computer. | To have students speak more |
| Join in authors | Students can continue or modify the original story | To build students' autonomy, and writing/ speaking skills |

6. Voice commander

After students hear some portions of the story, the software is waiting for their voice to respond. At that time the computer screen shows a sentence or a phrase of the story and asks the students to read it aloud. When the students speak the sentence or phrase, the computer screen shows the next sentence or phrase of the story or several words depending on the ability of the students (the students should be able to choose from among various alternatives).

Afterwards, only a few words appear on the screen and the students are asked to pronounce the words to build vocabulary. When the students do so, the 'voice commander' goes to the next step.

Join in authors

One of the most powerful features of hypermedia compared to audio-based equipment such as tape recorders is that it can present students' voices and visual information to students. Visual images on the computer screen can enhance the students' understanding, especially when the images are related to the narration. After students hear a part of the story, which had already been written by the teachers themselves, they are asked to create

their own story by using phrases and words on the screen. For instance, students are asked the following questions by the computer.

After Momotaro kept on walking, he met a spotted dog.

ぶち犬は彼に尋ねた。「どこに行くの」

The spotted dog asked him, "Where are you going?"

ももたろうは、「_____」と答えた。

Momotaro answered, "....."

犬は、彼に尋ねた。「腰につけた袋に何が入っているの」

The dog asked him, "What is in the bag hanging from your waist?"

ももたろうは、答えた。「_____」

Momotaro replied, "....."

Students can e-mail their answers to these questions or they can send voice messages. (It is also advisable to prepare a conference page on the web to which students can post their voice or text messages.) During this process, students can also pick out an image among several images that have been posted on the computer screen. After students post their opinions on the conference page, every student can see or hear the other students' unique stories. I named this function 'Join in authors'. The key idea of 'Join in authors' is that text, voice and images are linked to each other and can be downloaded easily using the hypermedia function of the computer. This effective linkage of several kinds of information can make learning very interesting for the students.

7. Conclusion

In this lesson plan described above, I use a Japanese folk tale because, by doing so, students not only acquire language skills, but also learn about the culture of the target language. Folk tales include oral and literate elements, which may help students develop oral as well as writing skills. Although folklore includes both elements of spoken and written language, there is still a discontinuity in its oral and literate representation. Therefore, visual imagery is an important feature in a curriculum based on stories to complement that discontinuity. Visual images will help students understand a story and make their own stories. Electronic media that have the capability of linking text, voice and images can integrate the spoken and written elements of folk tales. The use of hypermedia and the use of folk tales will enhance students' cognition and develop independent thinking.

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Appendix

*Peach Boy (version 1) *Original rendition by YUMIKO MAEDA*

One day, an old woman saw a big peach come floating down the river while washing her clothes. She took it and after she came home, she said to her husband, "Let's divide it and eat it right away". So the old woman brought out a big knife and was getting ready to cut the peach. But just then there was the sound of a human voice coming from inside the peach. "Wait! Don't cut me! The God of Heaven saw how lonely you were without any children, so he sent me to be your son", and thus they had a child. The boy, Momotaro, lived with the old couple and when he was about fifteen years old, he said to them, "Father, you have always been very kind to me. Now I am a big boy and I must do something to help my country." In a distant part of the sea there was an island named Ogre Island. Many wicked ogres live there. When Momotaro began his journey, he first met a spotted dog, then a monkey, and then a peasant on his way to Ogre Island. Momotaro gave them each a dumpling and asked them to come along. After a terrible battle, the ogres were completely defeated. Then Momotaro and his friends brought all the treasures to his home and the old woman and the old man became very rich.

*Peach Boy (version 2) * Original rendition by YUMIKO MAEDA*

Momotaro is strong, but he is lazy and never does anything. One day, his stepfather scolded him, saying "You are old enough, so don't be idle! Help me with my work!" Momotaro replied, "All right, I shall go to the mountain to cut a tree for you". His parents were very happy to hear that. When he reached the mountain, Momotaro did not know how to cut a big tree. So he uprooted a big tree. He said to himself, "Well, it's easier than cutting the tree." He pulled out many trees one by one and brought them home. However, he leaned them against the house, so that they crushed the house along with his old parents.