

Benefits of Digital Editing for Japanese Writing Instruction

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Abstract—This study examined the benefits of digital editing for Japanese writing instruction for Indonesian students. The participants of this study were 44 Indonesian university students who had majored in Japanese language and culture for approximately one year. The author of this study taught this course online for seven weeks and asked the participants to email photographs of their essays to him. The teacher first typed the texts of the participants' essays into Microsoft Word and then he corrected them, adding notes to the students. In this study, students were assigned points for their practice essay and final examination to the maximum of 50 to facilitate the comparison of the scores across individuals. The participants' practice essays were not scored. The participants were asked to compose on a sheet of 400-character manuscript paper. The teacher deducted one point for each error in grammar, spelling, particle, vocabulary, and conjugation. On average, out of 50 possible points, the participants obtained 37.82 points in the first writing practice and 46.91 points in the final examination. At a 5% level, the scores before and after the instruction through digital editing showed statistically significant differences ($p < 0.001$, $df = 43$, $t = 15.33$). These results show that digital editing using Microsoft Word improves Japanese-language learners' writing proficiency.

Index Terms—awareness, correction, digital editing, Japanese, writing

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Writing Systems in Japanese

Cook and Bassetti (2005), who explored learning the writing systems of various languages, including Japanese, indicated that the degree of morphological and phonological transparency in the target language determines its difficulty for learners. Japanese is written in two systems of phonetic characters called *hiragana* and *katakana*. Chinese characters, referred to in Japanese as *kanji*, are also used, and they have limited phonological transparency. The complex Japanese writing system affects writing instruction for learners of Japanese.

B. Importance of Correction in Writing Activities

Ensuring grammatically accurate writing is an important part of improving learners' productive skills. To this end, teachers should correct learners' writing to highlight repetitive errors and propose the most appropriate grammatical structures and lexical items.

The Society for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language (1990) suggested that the accurate use of characters, deployment of lexical and grammatical items, and expression of thoughts and opinions should be clearly distinguished as different elements that should be considered and given balanced attention in writing instruction, although this is difficult to balance the focus on these three elements.

C. Disadvantages of Manual Editing

The weekly composition assignments were handwritten, which was inconvenient for the teacher to edit. Texts edited by hand are difficult for students to read. Moreover, the reason or type of error marked is often not mentioned owing to space limitations.

For this reason, the teacher adopted digital editing on a trial basis, as this was a more learner-friendly approach. The most convenient aspect of digital editing using Microsoft Word is that this method suggests corrected texts in a typed form. This allows learners to easily correct their writing and save it for future use, such as for reviewing their mistakes or creating a learning portfolio. In addition, the corrections are easier to read in the digital format than in manually edited texts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Japan Foundation's (2011b) study stressed that instruction for intermediate learners focuses on the language content rather than the form. At this stage, topics closely related to learners' interests are used to motivate them to express their opinions and enhance their grammatical and lexical knowledge.

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Uni (2022b) investigated the effectiveness of using Japanese writing exercises that express moral values when teaching Japanese to Malaysian students and highlighted the importance of such exercise content. Extracts from a Japanese entrepreneur's book that discussed moral values were used as sample texts in writing exercises. The themes of these extracts, which included developing good habits and expressing gratitude, attracted the learners' interest.

Sugiura and Kido (2020) provided numerous practical suggestions on Japanese writing instruction for intermediate learners. Their study emphasized the importance of identifying a central idea and explicitly stating topics at the beginning of each paragraph. Next, learners present reasons and add other details regarding their opinions. In addition, their research recommended conducting discussion among learners to enable them to become aware of the differences in their viewpoints. When relativizing their ideas and values, learners can write texts objectively.

Learners' writing skills are closely associated with lexical and grammatical knowledge. Ringbom (2007) described the positive and negative impacts of the lexical and grammatical similarities between learners' first and their target languages. For instance, Swedish-speaking English learners in Ringbom's study wrote and spoke English more accurately than Finnish-speaking participants. Ringbom conjectured that the Finnish-speaking participants' performance was a result of the grammatical, morphologic, and phonetic differences between English and Finnish. Ringbom's (2012) review of recent studies in applied linguistics from Finland and Sweden identified positive effects of cross-linguistic similarities. English and Dutch vocabularies have thousands of items that share etymologies, called cognates. Poort and Rodd (2017) explored the usefulness of cross-linguistic cognates by observing Dutch-English bilinguals' lexical choices between cognates and noncognates. Lithuanian is among the most remote Indo-European languages in Europe from English. Uni's (2022a) study suggested that using the many shared cognates of Latin or Greek origin that are similar between the two languages would enable English speakers to learn Lithuanian more easily.

However, etymological similarity seldom exists between unrelated languages such as Japanese and Southeast Asian languages. The study by the Japan Foundation (2007) suggested that grammatical and lexical differences between learners' first language and Japanese can lead to difficulty in understanding certain features of the target language.

Uni (2022c) explored the advantages of using the Instagram and WhatsApp software for online Japanese instruction for Malaysian university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that the effective use of social network systems appeared to support learning Japanese. Uni's study focused in particular on interference caused by the learners' first language. A participant in that study incorrectly rendered ゆうめい (*yūmei*) and アニメーション (*animēshon*) as ゆめい (*yumei*) and アニメション (*animeshon*), respectively. This suggests that the absence of long vowels in that learner's first language, Malay, caused phonetic and orthographic errors.

Malay and Indonesian belong to the Austronesian family of languages and are somewhat mutually intelligible as Indonesian is based on a Malay dialect that has been standardized as the national language of Indonesia since the mid-twentieth century (Crystal, 2010). Because learners' first language affects their foreign language learning, the errors that Malay and Indonesian speakers make in Japanese may be similar.

Learners' lexical knowledge can be improved using vocabulary lists and maps. Tokuhiko (2010) proposed the use of vocabulary maps with English, Korean, and Mandarin translations, exemplifying groups of lexical items in 14 fields, such as nature, daily life, food, and hobbies. For instance, 音楽 (*ongaku*) "music" is at the center of a cluster of words including 歌 (*uta*) "song," 歌手 (*kashu*) "singer," 歌う (*utau*) "sing," and ピアノ (*piano*) "piano." Such categorization can enhance writing skills.

However, the Japan Foundation's (2011a) study pointed out the disadvantages of the use of vocabulary lists and maps, noting that these materials carry the risk of demotivating certain learners who are unaccustomed to rote memorization. Therefore, teachers should use lists and maps carefully based on students' needs and preferences.

Matsumoto (2013), who investigated word recognition models for Chinese characters in Japanese and Mandarin, discovered that when the study participants read semantic information on Chinese characters, their orthographic processing was more closely connected with comprehension of meaning than was their phonological processing. Thus, semantic features are important for the reading, writing, and vocabulary learning in Japanese.

Uni (2019) proposed an approach to learning Japanese vocabulary that focuses on semantic similarities between Japanese words, such as 光 (*hikari*) ("light") and 輝く (*kagayaku*) ("shine"), and their Malay equivalents, such as *cahaya* ("light") and *bercahaya* ("shine"). These cross-linguistic pairs share radicals that mean "light." In addition, Rose (2013) analyzed Japanese-language learners' use of mnemonic strategies for learning *kanji* characters and their components. His study suggested that semantic aspects primarily helped learners memorize *kanji* characters.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants of this study were 44 Indonesian university students who had majored in Japanese language and culture for approximately one year. They attended a composition class once per week and took conversation, listening, and reading classes in the first semester of their second year.

B. Details of the Writing Activities

The learners were asked to handwrite their writing assignments. This requirement was imposed to prevent students from plagiarizing texts on the internet for their compositions. Moreover, the learners had had few opportunities to write Japanese by hand, and this strategy enabled them to spend more time on honing this skill. The participants were asked to compose on a sheet of 400-character manuscript paper. The direction of writing was vertical, as is the convention in composition classes.

The author of this study taught this course online for seven weeks and asked the participants to email photographs of their essays to him. The teacher first typed the texts of the participants' essays into Microsoft Word and then corrected them, adding notes for the students.

In this study, students were assigned maximum 50 points for their practice essay and final examination to facilitate the comparison of scores between individuals. The teacher deducted one point for each error in grammar, spelling, particle, vocabulary, or conjugation. The participants' practice essays were not scored. The main purpose of digital editing using Microsoft Word was to raise the participants' awareness about their errors and the reasons that they were incorrect.

C. Editing Notes Used in the Corrected Texts

The first type of note indicated the deletion of unnecessary words, as in "(→ ×)." For example, the editing note "大学(の→ ×)一年生" meant that the particle の (no) "of" between 大学 (daigaku) "university" and 一年生 (ichinensei) "first-year student" should be removed. The second type of note suggested using an alternative spelling using kanji for a word, indicated by "(→ write in kanji, i.e., [...])." In particular, participants frequently used Arabic numerals even in vertically written Japanese texts that conventionally spell numerals in kanji.

The third type of note recommended movement of words, primarily as in "(→ move to the previous position)" or "(→ move to the following position)." This note indicated that a word or phrase should be moved to a more appropriate position in the sentence. The fourth type of note was correction, shown using "(→)" together with the corrected words. Additionally, error categories such as incorrect tense and informal tone were marked in this note. For example, the editing note "いる(→ いた <past tense>)" indicated that the present verb いる (iru) "there is" should be changed to いた (ita) "there was," the past tense of いる (iru). As an optional correction, 今 (ima) "now" was amended to "今(or 現在 <formal>)" in the revision, which suggested 現在 (genzai) "present" as a more formal word than 今 (ima) "now."

The fifth type of note was an addition, indicated by "(+)" along with additional words. When amending a student's text to recommend additions, the author corrected the phrase 高校生から (kōkōsei kara) "from a high school student" to 高校生(+のころ)から (kōkōsei no koro kara) "since I was a high school student," as it appeared with the phrase 日本語を勉強しています (nihongo o benkyō shiteimasu) "I have been studying Japanese".

Finally, a clean revision was presented separately below the text, with editing directions to allow the participants to save the clean text as part of their learning portfolio, making it useful for review at the end of the semester. Table 1 provides an example of the corrected text (above) and its clean revision (below).

TABLE 1
CORRECTED TEXT (ABOVE) AND ITS CLEAN REVISION (BELOW)

| |
|---|
| 将来の夢 "dream for the future" 私は将来インドネシア語のきょうし(→ write in kanji, i.e., 教師)になりたいです。それは、いつか日本の大学でインドネシア語を教えたい(+から)です。 (+大学)一年生のころ、初めて小学生(+にインドネシア語)を教えました。(それは、とても楽しい経験でした。)そして、(+同じころ、)日本から留学している友達は私たちの大学で日本語を教えて(+いて)、かつこい(→かつこよく)そうです(→見えました <past tense>。(+)そのため、私も大学で教えたいと思いはじめました。) そのころから、私は(+将来、)日本に行つてインドネシア語を教えるために、日本語(+や日本に関するさまざまなこと)をよく(→個人的にも)勉強しています。今(or 現在 <formal>)も、私は日本語能力試験を(→に)合格するために、日本語(+を)きちんと(→熱心に)勉強しています。 そつぎょうご(→ write in kanji, i.e., 卒業後)、私は日本へ行つて(→留学し <more specific than 行つて>)、日本語を(続けて → ×)勉強する(→し続ける)つもりです。 |
| 将来の夢 "dream for the future" 私は将来インドネシア語の教師になりたいです。それは、いつか日本の大学でインドネシア語を教えたいからです。 大学一年生のころ、初めて小学生にインドネシア語を教えました。それは、とても楽しい経験でした。そして、同じころ、日本から留学している友達は私達の大学で日本語を教えていて、かつこよく見えました。そのため、私も大学で教えたいと思いはじめました。 そのころから、私は将来、日本に行つてインドネシア語を教えるために、日本語や日本に関するさまざまなことを個人的にも勉強しています。現在も、私は日本語能力試験に合格するために、日本語を熱心に勉強しています。 卒業後、私は日本へ留学し、日本語を勉強し続けるつもりです。 |

D. Topics of Practice Essays and the Final Examination

The themes "dream for the future", "funny stories", and "tourist sites I have visited", used for practice essays were based on topics from the textbook *Minna no Nihongo: Intermediate I*. "The hardest thing I have attempted" was used

instead of “my failure”, the theme of a reading passage in Lesson 10. This substitution was made because learners may benefit more from describing their experiences positively. Another assignment was to write a practice essay on the theme of “hobbies and things I am good at” instead of the theme “karaoke,” the theme of the reading passage in Lesson 9.

The topic of the final exam was “a country I would like to visit.” This theme was announced to the students three days before the exam. They were then required to elaborate on the content of their texts before the exam. The use of cell phones and electronic dictionaries was prohibited during the exam, and the students were required to compose their texts by themselves.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

A. Respondents' Scores

The participants averaged 37.82 points for the first practice and 46.91 points for the final examination. Microsoft Excel Version 2312 was used to perform statistical analyses of these data. At a 5% level, the scores before and after the instruction through digital editing showed statistically significant differences ($p < 0.001$, $df = 43$, $t = 15.33$). Table 2 presents the details of the respondents' scores, including their t - and p -values. Tables 3 and 4 in the appendix present the scores obtained for each respondent in the first writing practice and the final examination, respectively.

TABLE 2
DETAILS OF THE RESPONDENTS' SCORES

| | First Practice | Final Examination |
|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Mean | 37.82 | 46.91 |
| Standard Deviation | 17.78 | 3.85 |
| Total Number | 44 | 44 |
| t -Value | 15.33 | |
| p -Value | < 0.001 | |

B. Characteristics of Errors Observed in the Final Examination

Confusion regarding vowel length errors was noted in the exam results. For instance, しょうらい (*shōrai*) “future” was incorrectly spelled しょらい (*shorai*), showing a shortened vowel. Another similar example is that of アティスト (*atisuto*) instead of アーティスト (*ātisuto*) “artist”. Further, a student misspelled おいしそう (*oishisō*) “it seems delicious” as おいしそ (*oishiso*). The absence of long vowels in Indonesian may have led to their omission in learners' Japanese. However, a participant mistakenly spelled ばしょ (*basho*) “place” as ばしょう (*bashō*), lengthening the vowel in hypercorrection.

A much smaller number of errors were made in this exam compared with the first writing practice. A respondent incorrectly wrote いっしょに (*issho ni*) “together” as いしょに (*isho ni*), simplifying the double consonant; the Japanese homophone いしょ (*isho*) “testament”, which is similar to the incorrect spelling, risks confusing readers.

The errors in vowels and consonants observed in this study resemble those observed in Uni's (2022a, 2022b) studies conducted in Malay-speaking learners. Thus, interference caused by learners' first language was similar for speakers of both Malay and Indonesian.

A common error regarding the use of *kanji* is the absence of a component. One participant wrote 実祭 while intending to write 実際 (*jissai*) “in fact”; the left-side component of 際 was missing. The Chinese-origin pronunciation of the characters 祭 and 際 is *sai*, which may have confused the participant. A similar error was 里由 instead of 理由 (*riyū*) “reason” because the Chinese-origin pronunciations of the characters 里 and 理 (*ri*) are identical. In some cases, the stroke length of the characters was incorrect. For example, a student used 各 “each” instead of 名 “name” to write the adjective 有名な (*yūmeina*) “famous”.

Vocabulary errors were also greatly reduced in the exam. However, a respondent wrote アニメ物 (*anime mono*) when intending to write アニメグッズ (*anime guzzu*) “animation goods.” The use of collocated words such as グッズ (*guzzu*) “goods” seemed difficult for this participant at the upper beginner level. There were also minor errors, such as the use of 食物 (*shokumotsu*), primarily meaning “food” as a term in natural science, instead of 食べ物 (*tabemono*), meaning “food” as a common word. In a possible confusion with the word ふたつ (*futatsu*) “two things”, the respondent used ふたり (*futari*) “two people” to refer to two places. The most appropriate word is 二か所 (*ni kasho*) “two places”. The noun 試験 (*shiken*) “examination”, as well as the collocation 試験を受ける (*shiken o ukeru*) “take an examination”, includes the verb 受ける (*ukeru*) “accept”. Another participant incorrectly used the verb 受け取る (*uketoru*) “receive” because of confusion between the two verbs, which both include the *kanji* 受, meaning “accept” and “receive”.

Regarding demonstratives, the misuse of あそこ (*asoko*) “over there” and あの国 (*ano kuni*) “that country”, which includes an inappropriate demonstrative, was observed at instances where words such as そこ (*soko*) “there” or その国 (*sono kuni*) “that country” should be used.

There were mistakes with particles. For example, the particle を (*o*), which is used with the verb 訪れる (*otozureru*) “visit” to indicate a place as an object, was incorrectly replaced with に (*ni*) “to”. Additionally, the particle を (*o*) before 卒業する (*sotsugyō suru*) “graduate” also seemed difficult for learners to grasp. One reason for this may be that prepositions such as “from” are used in similar expressions in English. A participant wrote イギリスにお茶文化 (*Igirisu ni ocha bunka*), which may be modified to イギリスにおける紅茶文化 (*Igirisu ni okeru kōcha bunka*) “tea culture in the United Kingdom”. Because the particle に (*ni*) “in” cannot be directly connected to a noun, おける (*okeru*) was added. In addition, the noun お茶 (*ocha*), meaning “tea” generally, was corrected to 紅茶 (*kōcha*) “black tea” as a more specific term.

Some learners used the incorrect verb conjugation たいである (*tai de aru*), although たい (*tai*) “want to (+ a verb)” is sufficient. In Japanese, the combination of まだ (*mada*) “yet” and the negative verb form means “have not done yet”. A participant wrote まだ見ませんでした (*mada mimasendeshita*), including a past form, instead of まだ見ていません (*mada miteimasen*) possibly because an equivalent English structure includes a past participle.

A participant interested in Kyoto explained the reason by writing the sentence 京都にはたくさんの歴史があるからです (*Kyōto ni wa takusan no rekishi ga aru kara desu*), where たくさんの (*takusan no*) “many” does not match the noun 歴史 (*rekishi*) “history”. The combination of 京都には (*Kyōto ni wa*) and がある (*ga aru*) means “Kyoto has (+ an object)”. The correct expression would be modified to 歴史的建築物 (*rekishiteki kenchikubutsu*) “historical constructions”.

V. CONCLUSION

This study examined the benefits of digital editing for Japanese writing instruction for Indonesian university students who had majored in Japanese language and culture for about one year. On average, of the maximum 50 points, the participants obtained 37.82 points in the first writing practice and 46.91 points in the final examination. At a 5% level, the scores before and after instruction via digital editing showed statistically significant differences ($p < 0.001$, $df = 43$, $t = 15.33$). These results indicate that digital editing using Microsoft Word improves Japanese-language learners’ writing proficiency.

A major limitation of this study is that typing out learners’ handwritten texts is time-consuming. Educators who have no time to type learners’ texts may wish to type and return only clean revisions to allow learners to make the best of the corrections for review and other learning purposes.

APPENDIX. ADDITIONAL TABLES

TABLE 3
RESPONDENTS’ SCORES FOR THE FIRST WRITING PRACTICE

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 30 | 39 | 41 | 45 | 45 | 38 | 40 | 42 | 39 | 38 | 35 | 42 | 40 | 34 | 36 | 35 | 39 | 38 | 41 | 38 |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 | 33 | 34 | 35 | 36 | 37 | 38 | 39 | 40 |
| 40 | 34 | 35 | 44 | 38 | 32 | 45 | 44 | 33 | 37 | 39 | 36 | 33 | 37 | 37 | 42 | 30 | 30 | 30 | 44 |
| 41 | 42 | 43 | 44 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 40 | 35 | 38 | 36 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

TABLE 4
RESPONDENTS’ SCORES FOR THE FINAL EXAMINATION

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 48 | 48 | 42 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 45 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 48 | 50 | 47 | 46 | 49 | 49 | 48 |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 | 33 | 34 | 35 | 36 | 37 | 38 | 39 | 40 |
| 49 | 49 | 45 | 49 | 45 | 47 | 47 | 49 | 42 | 46 | 44 | 45 | 44 | 47 | 48 | 48 | 46 | 45 | 43 | 48 |
| 41 | 42 | 43 | 44 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 47 | 44 | 48 | 47 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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