

# JAPANESE LANGUAGE TEACHING AT TERTIARY LEVEL IN SLOVENIA: PAST EXPERIENCES, FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

**Kristina HMEJAK SANGAWA**

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

kristina.hmeljak@ff.uni-lj.si

## Abstract

Japanese language teaching does not have a very long tradition in Slovenia, yet the teaching of Japanese has significantly developed both in qualitative and in quantitative terms in the past 20 years. This paper reviews past Japanese language courses and the development of Japanese language instruction in Slovenia in different institutional settings, pointing out changes in learner motivation, increasing accessibility of language learning resources, and the growth and diversification of present and potential Japanese language teachers. The paper concludes with possibilities for further development of Japanese language instruction and for an increased networking among Japanese language teachers.

**Keywords:** Japanese language teaching; L2 Japanese learning; learning motivation; autonomous learning

## Povzetek

Didaktika japonsčine v Sloveniji sicer nima zelo dolge tradicije, toda poučevanje japonsčine se je v zadnjih dvajsetih letih izrazito razvilo tako količinsko kot kakovostno. Članek diahrono opisuje dosedanje oblike pouka japonsčine in razvoj didaktike japonsčine v Sloveniji, s posebnim poudarkom na spremembah motivacije za učenje japonsčine, rastoči dostopnosti virov za učenje jezika ter rasti števila in profilov sedanjih in potencialnih učiteljev japonsčine. Na osnovi tega so predstavljene možnosti za bodoči razvoj didaktike japonsčine in za nadaljnje povezovanje med različnimi učitelji japonsčine.

**Ključne besede:** didaktika japonsčine; učenje japonsčine; učna motivacija; samostojno učenje

## 1 Japanese language teaching in Slovenia: a chronological overview

Japanese language teaching in Slovenia began in the 1980s, with some courses in “people’s universities” (lifelong education institutions). In 1982 the Slovene Orientalist Society (Slovensko orientalistično društvo, founded in 1973), supported by a modest

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state subvention, started offering free open courses for the general public, taught by Ms. Chikako Shigemori Bučar and dr. Andrej Bekeš, two pioneers of Japanese language teaching in Slovenia (Bekeš, 1985, 2005). Between 1982 and 1989 there were Japanese language courses for beginning and intermediate learners, held regularly twice a week from October to June. However, after both teachers moved abroad in 1990, the courses could be offered only intermittently, as short intensive courses during the spring or summer holidays (Shigemori, 1994; Rošker, 2009). In 1989-90 a first attempt was made at establishing an East Asia Studies programme at the University of Ljubljana, but failed due to political and economic instability (Bekeš, 2005). Activities aimed at disseminating knowledge of the Japanese language and culture continued, with a symposium on Japanese language and culture held at the Cankarjev Dom Culture Centre in Ljubljana in March 1991 (Shigemori, 1991), an introductory Japanese language course at Kidrič People's University (Bekeš, 1992), and short intensive courses offered by visiting instructors or teacher-trainees from Japanese universities during the school holidays in March and July (Bekeš, 2005).

After Slovenia became an independent state in 1991, the need was felt for Slovenian specialists who could act as direct links with the economically, politically and culturally influential areas of East Asia. Three specialists who had completed their postgraduate studies abroad drafted a curriculum for the undergraduate study of East Asia at the University of Ljubljana: dr. Andrej Bekeš prepared a plan for the Japanese studies programme, dr. Jana Rošker and dr. Mitja Saje planned the Chinese studies programme, and after some years of intensive preparations and negotiations, in 1995 the University of Ljubljana approved the new programmes and opened a new department offering these courses (Rošker, 2009). The first, infelicitously eurocentric name of the department (*Department of Non-European Studies*) was soon changed into the more appropriate *Department of Asian and African Studies*, with the expectation that a course of African studies would soon be added. Regrettably, this plan was not realised, and in 2016 the name was shortened to *Department of Asian Studies*, to reflect its actual contents.

The East Asian Studies B.A. programme opened in 1995 had two tracks: Japanology and Sinology, offered as one half of a double-major, i.e. to be combined with any of the other majors offered at the Faculty of Arts (Bekeš et al., 1995), including the very demanding combination of both Japanology and Sinology. During the first ten years of implementation, the most frequent second majors chosen by students who enrolled into the programme of Japanese studies were sociology, history or other languages and literatures (English, Spanish, German etc.), but combinations were very varied, ranging from political science to journalism, geography, theology and musicology.

The double-major format of study was chosen partly out of necessity, since at first there were not enough teachers to offer a complete single-major programme of Japanese studies, but also with the intent to offer a flexible framework within which

students could combine the study of Japanese language and culture with another discipline, thus integrating their knowledge of Japan, its language and culture, with the theoretical and methodological framework offered by their other chosen discipline. (Bekeš, 2005, p. 54).

## **2 Bootstrapping Japanese studies with the development of the Japan studies programme at the University of Ljubljana**

When the Japanese studies programme was launched in 1995, the only Slovene-speaking expert in Japanese studies was the founder of the programme, while the author of the present article joined the department in 1996 after graduate study in Japan. Classes were therefore held mainly by rotating language instructors and visiting professors from Japanese universities, on the basis of inter-university cooperation agreements and in the first years with financial support from the Japan Foundation. These courses were also complemented by subjects common to both the Japanology and Sinology programme, including an introduction to the history of East Asia, Chinese classical literature, Chinese philosophy and the methodology of intercultural research, since the aim of the programme was to form graduates who would be “knowledgeable about Japan (or China), possess a reasonable command of modern language, and [...] a basic understanding of developments in the whole region” (Bekeš, 2005).

A solid linguistic knowledge was seen as a prerequisite for the study of other aspects of this region using also primary sources in Japanese. The majority of language classes in the first ten years of the department was taught by Japanese language instructors from Japanese universities who were native speakers of Japanese. Language classes accounted for the majority of the students' class time in the first two years (10 out of 12 hours in the first year, 8 out of 14 hours in the second year), in order to prepare students to read and use primary sources in the following years, while in the second half of the programme there was a larger proportion of non-linguistic subjects (only 6 out of 14 hours of Japanese language in the third year, and 2 out of 14 in the fourth year). However, part of the non-linguistic subjects, such as Cultural History of East Asia, were taught in Japanese by visiting professors from Japan, in an early example of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning, as proposed by Genesee 1994).

After some very slight revisions to the first curriculum (Bekeš et al., 1995), in 1999 the Japanese studies double-major programme included the subjects shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Japanese studies double-major curriculum at the University of Ljubljana (launched in 1995 and revised in 1999)

Year of study	Subject	Class hours per week	Total class hours
1st year	Modern Japanese 1	8	240
	Japanese writing	2	60
	History of East Asia 1	2	60
2nd year	Modern Japanese 2	6	180
	History of East Asia II	2	60
	Chinese literature	2	60
	Methodology of intercultural research	2	60
	Japanese linguistics 1	2	60
3rd year	Modern Japanese 3	4	120
	Japanese literature	2	60
	Japanese translation 1	2	60
	Classical Japanese	2	60
	Chinese philosophy	2	60
	One elective subject	2	60
4th year	Japanese translation 2	2	60
	Methodology of intercultural research	2	60
	Religions of East Asia	2	60
	Cultural history of East Asia	2	60
	Japanese computer processing	2	60
	Two elective subjects	4	120
Electives	Classical Japanese	2	60
	Classical Japanese - kanbun	2	60
	Japanese linguistics 2	2	60
	Japanese sociology	2	60
	Academic writing	2	60
	Japanese history	2	60
	Korean language	2	60

During the first years of the department, the teaching staff developed basic Japanese textbooks, a dictionary, and gradually widened the contents of the curriculum.

In 2001 the first students graduated, and in 2003 one of the first graduates of the department was hired as an assistant. During the following years, the temporary language instructors from Japan were gradually replaced by other graduates of the department who had completed their graduate study abroad or in other departments

of the University of Ljubljana. Other subjects related to Japan could thus be offered by these graduates specialised in different disciplines.

During the same period, the University of Ljubljana implemented a comprehensive reform of all its study programmes to comply with the Bologna guidelines for the European Higher Education Area and the European Credit Transfer System. The Japanese studies programme was also reformed to comply with these guidelines, and offered as a three-year B.A. course (from October 2009), followed by a two-year M.A. course (offered from October 2012 for the first generation of graduates of the reformed three-year B.A. programme). Given the possibility of flexible combinations with elective subjects from other programmes and the very demanding nature of the double-major system (which had proved too difficult for a large part of the students, leading to drop-out rates of up to 50%, see Moritoki, 1996, 1998; Bekeš & Shigemori, 2003), the department decided to offer not only a double-major programme, as a continuation of the original 4-year Japanese studies programme, but also a single-major programme with a considerable proportion of elective subjects to be chosen from a selection of subjects related to East Asia, its languages, societies and cultures, but also other specific subjects to be chosen from other study programmes of the Faculty of Arts. The subjects composing the curriculum are shown in tables 2 and 3.

**Table 2:** Japanese studies B.A. single-major curriculum at the University of Ljubljana (launched in 2009 and revised in 2013)

Year of study	Subject	Class hours	ECTS
1 <sup>st</sup> year	Modern Japanese 1	300	18
	Introduction to East Asian studies	30	6
	History of East Asia	60	6
	Japanese in practice 1	60	6
	Elective (within the department)		18
	Elective (in any department)		6
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Modern Japanese 2	240	18
	Introduction to Japanese history	60	6
	Introduction to Japanese linguistics	60	6
	Japanese in practice 2	60	6
	Elective (within the department)		18
	Elective (in any department)		3
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Modern Japanese 3	210	18
	Introduction to Japanese literature	60	6
	Japanese Society	60	6
	Elective (within the department)		18

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	Elective (in any department)		6
	BA thesis seminar	60	6
Electives	(within the department)		
	Introduction to Japanese calligraphy	30	3
	Japanese music 1	30	3
	Japanese music 2	30	3
	Japanese music 3	30	3
	Japanese music 4	30	3
	Asian religions	30	3
	Introduction to Buddhist art and iconography	30	3
	Chinese art	60	6
	Chinese philosophy	30	3
	Modern Chinese 1	90	6
	Modern Chinese 2	90	4
	Modern Chinese 3	90	4
	Chinese calligraphy	30	3
	The position and role of Taiwan in the international community	60	6
	Modern theoretical discourses	30	3
	Selected topics in Chinese culture	30	3
	Modern Korean 1	150	9
	Modern Korean 2	150	9
	Modern Korean 3	120	6
	Korean phonetics 1	30	3
	Korean phonetics 2	30	3
	Korean writing 1	30	3
	Korean culture	30	3
	Introduction to Korean literature 1	30	3
	Korean art 1	30	3
	Korean art 2	30	3
	Modern Persian	60	6
	Culture of Islam	30	3
	Internship	60	6
	Intercultural communication	60	6
	Team research	0	6

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**Table 3:** Japanese studies M.A. single-major curriculum at the University of Ljubljana (launched in 2009 and revised in 2017)

Year of study	Subject	Class hours	ECTS
1 <sup>st</sup> year	Analysis and translation of Japanese media texts II	60	6
	Analysis and translation of Japanese scientific texts I	60	6
	Elective (within the department)		36
	Elective (in any department)		12
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Analysis and translation of Japanese scientific texts II	60	6
	Master thesis seminar	60	6
	Master thesis and defense		21
	Elective (within the department)		18
Electives	Elective (in any department)		6
	(within the department)		
	The language of Japanese media	30	3
	Information resources and tools for Japanese studies	30	3
	Modern Japanese literature	30	3
	Contemporary Japanese literature	30	3
	Classical Japanese literature	30	3
	Classical Japanese performing arts	30	3
	Topics in Japanese sociology	30	3
	Epistemology of Japanese studies	30	3
	Introduction to Japanese consecutive interpreting	30	3
	Selected topics in Japanese cultural history	30	3
	Selected topics in Japanese history of thought	30	3
	Japanese language teaching 1	60	6
	Japanese language teaching 2	30	3

Comparing the first four-year B.A. double-major curriculum with the present three-year B.A. and two-year M.A. Single-major curriculum, two trends can be observed: an increase in the number of subjects related to Japan, and a shift in the ratio of the hours of language classes to other classes, stemming from the fact that the overall number of classes in a single-major programme amounts to twice the number of classes in a double-major programme. The new double-major three-year B.A. programme, on the other hand, retained the very demanding curricular structure of the first programme,

with more than half of the learning load devoted to language learning, less elective subjects related to Asia and no elective subjects from other departments.

The expansion of curriculum content noticeable in the single-major programme was made possible partly by some changes of the teaching staff. While in the first years of the department the chair of Japanese studies was composed of language specialists, most of them from Japan, in 2017, half of the teaching staff (4 out of 8) were graduates of the Japanese studies programme of the University of Ljubljana, specialising in different areas of expertise related to Japan.

In order to compensate for the relatively fewer hours of language instruction in the now three-year B.A. programme (if compared to the previous 4-year B.A. programme), some intensive additional activities were introduced, beginning with a two-week immersion programme with exchange students from Japanese partner universities, and continuing the tradition of CLIL in some elective subjects (calligraphy and literature).

### 3 Student enrolment and shifting motivation

Student application and enrolment has somewhat fluctuated over time, as can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Japanese studies programme enrolment quotas and number of applicants

Four-year B.A. programme		
Year	quota	applicants
1995_96		38
1996_97		45
1997_98	40	53
1998_99	40	60
1999_00	40	43
2000_01	40	47
2001_02	40	42
2002_03	40	38
2003_04	40	28
2004_05	50	25
2005_06	50	35
2006_07	50	46
2007_08	50	44
2008_09	50	53



Three-year double-major B.A. programme			Three-year single-major B.A. programme		
Year	quota	applicants	Year	quota	applicants
2009_10	20	39	2009_10	30	30
2010_11	20	43	2010_11	30	35
2011_12	20	29	2011_12	30	36
2012/13	10	33	2012/13	20	24
2013/14	10	23	2013/14	20	30
2014/15	15	32	2014/15	15	32
2015/16	15	26	2015/16	15	37
2016/17	15	25	2016/17	15	33
2017/18	15	34	2017/18	15	25

The number of applicants was considerably high after the launch of the three-year single-major Japanese studies programme. Two possible reasons for this increase in the number of applicants could be the growing numbers of Slovene youth interested in Japanese popular culture in the last decade, and the appeal of the new shorter three-year programme, with a single-major option that is plausibly less daunting than the previous curriculum. Drop-out rates diminished considerably after the enrolment quotas were reduced in 2012, maintaining a largely constant number of ca. 15 graduations per year on average.

Intrinsic motivation is one of the major factors influencing the sustained and successful learning of a foreign or second language (Dörnyei, 2003). Within the Japanese studies programme, student motivation has partially shifted during the past 20 years. In the 1990s, the most frequent reasons given by students in questionnaires about their motives for studying Japanese were that 1) they wanted to learn a challenging language; 2) they were interested in Japanese culture (films, literature); 3) they practiced martial arts; 4) they wished to travel to Japan.

In the 2010s, the most frequent motives mentioned in questionnaires were: 1) an interest in Japanese popular culture (anime, manga); 2) the desire to learn a challenging language; 3) the desire to travel to Japan; 4) the intention of working in Japan; 5) martial arts.

Interest in popular culture has thus superseded other motives, and a growing number of students mentions their wish to work in Japan.

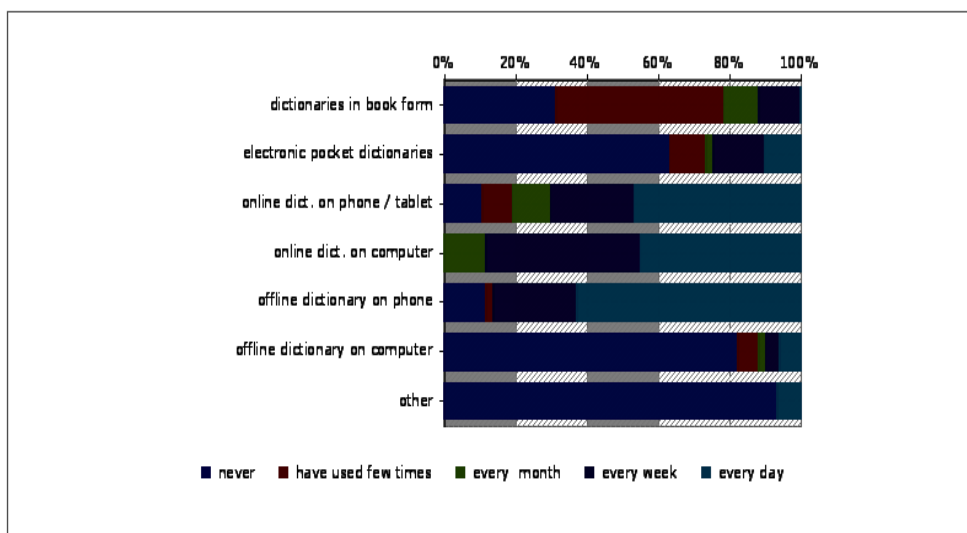
#### **4 Increasing accessibility of language learning resources – growing learning opportunities**

Language learning resources have considerably diversified in the last twenty years. In the 1990s, when the Japanese studies course was established, students had at their disposal little more than a textbook and a dictionary in book form that had to be ordered by mail from Japan at a considerable expense.

In the 2000s other resources began to appear: with the growth of internet accessibility and use, students began to communicate with Japanese friends and acquaintances via email, and those who travelled to Japan to study had the opportunity of buying electronic pocket dictionaries. These were not ideal tools for beginning learners of Japanese, since they were designed for Japanese native speakers and did not always provide easy access to the pronunciations of words written in standard Japanese script, but were nevertheless appreciated by students for their portability, relative ease of use and large number of lemmas when compared to pocket dictionaries in book form.

While a questionnaire on dictionary use in 1997 revealed that all of the students owned or had borrowed a dictionary in book form and were using it on a regular basis, and none of them mentioned other resources, a similar questionnaire in 2006 showed that the majority of students in the third or later year of study owned an electronic pocket dictionary and were using it more often than paper dictionaries. In 2013 only 15 out of 17 respondents to a similar questionnaire on dictionary use reported owning a dictionary in book form.

In 2016, in a questionnaire survey on the use of dictionaries and other resources among students of Japanese at the University of Ljubljana, only 10% of the 51 respondents reported weekly using a dictionary in book form, while all reported regularly using online dictionaries, the majority of them using a dictionary on their smartphone every day, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Japanese learners' use of dictionaries in 2016

Resources for studying Japanese have thus substantially grown and diversified in the 2010s. New resources include not only the ever growing number and types of online resources, from dictionaries, explanations, exercises and learning games, to multimedia content, video on demand and limitless opportunities of reading and hearing Japanese, but also new modes of communication, new online communities and opportunities to practice Japanese in online environments outside the classroom (Murakami, 2015). Students are increasingly taking advantage of language exchange portals such as lang-8, and other social network services in order to use – in real communicative situations – what they have learned in class, or to learn, practice and enjoy even linguistic content they have never encountered in class.

Learners are thus increasingly autonomous and connected with their local classmates and with other users of Japanese, both native and non-native speakers who may be geographically distant but immediately reachable within online communities. In the last few years, an increasing number of freshly enrolled students at the University of Ljubljana have already learned some Japanese autonomously and continue with their autonomous learning all through their formal study.

Moreover, even traditional (face-to-face, offline) courses of Japanese outside the University of Ljubljana are becoming less rare. Japanese as a foreign language is not yet accredited as a subject in Slovenian elementary and secondary schools, but it can be learned in language courses organised by private language schools outside the university, mostly taught by graduates of the University of Ljubljana. Most such courses are offered in the capital, others are scattered throughout Slovenia: in high schools (e.g. Slovenj Gradec, Plečnik High School in Ljubljana, Idrija etc.), an elementary school (Vipava), life-long learning institutions (e.g. Pionirski dom, Ljudska univerza), etc.

## 5 Teacher training: present situation and future possibilities

In the first four-year B.A. programme (for generations enrolled from 1995 to 2008) it was possible to combine Japanese studies with a teacher training track of another major. Unfortunately, since the introduction of the three-year B.A. and two-year M.A. in 2009, only non-teaching tracks can be combined with Japanese, thus effectively preventing anyone from earning a teacher degree while studying also Japanese.

In 2017 the Ministry of education, science and sports finally agreed on eliminating some formal obstacles preventing new teaching-track programmes to be accredited, and the Department of Asian studies plans to apply for the accreditation of a Japanese studies – teacher training programme. All subjects needed to fulfil the requirements for a Japanese language teacher-training programme at the M.A. level are already being offered, including the subjects *Japanese language teaching 1* and *Japanese language teaching 2*. These subjects are attended as elective subjects by most students of the M.A. Japanese studies programme, and also encompass two trainee teacher internship placements in the form of short intensive language courses for high-school students. When formal obstacles for the accreditation of a teacher-training programme in Japanese studies are lifted, hopefully in one or two years time, aspiring teachers of Japanese could combine the study of Japanese with another accredited school subject, such as English, earning the qualification required to teach at primary and secondary schools.

While Chinese has already been accredited as an elective subject in primary and secondary schools in Slovenia (Petrovčič, 2018), Japanese is not yet accredited as a foreign language subject in Slovene schools. The accreditation may take several years to be completed, and even after these formal requirements are fulfilled, any individual school will have to decide whether to offer Japanese as a third foreign language or as an extracurricular activity, depending on the demand for Japanese among their pupils or students, and on the possibility of employing a teacher of Japanese (for a more detailed discussion, see Moritoki (2018) in this volume).

Language planning and implementation are not necessarily a linear or rational process, as vividly exemplified by Kemp (2017), and a considerable number of requirements need to be fulfilled before Japanese classes are actually introduced and taught at primary and secondary level in Slovenia. The possibility, however, certainly exists, supported also by the growing number of children and youth interested in Japanese popular culture, and a group of potential teachers of Japanese who have started to network and collaborate in the Association of Japanese Language Teaching in Slovenia (DDJAS), established in 2016. In the future, more networking of UL graduates, Japanese residents and autonomous learners could contribute to the formation of a lively community of language learners, teachers and users.

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