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SOME CONSERVATIVE TEACHING METHODS FOR TECHNICAL JAPANESE LANGUAGE

Babayeva Mahym

Lecturer of Oguz han Engineering and Technology University of Turkmenistan Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Yegeleyeva Annasoltan

Student of Oguz han Engineering and Technology University of Turkmenistan Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Abstract

This article examines traditional, conservative approaches to teaching technical Japanese language, focusing on methods that prioritize accuracy, grammar mastery, and foundational knowledge. It discusses how conservative strategies, such as grammar-translation methods, repetitive drills, and kanji memorization, can contribute to developing solid language skills for engineers and technical professionals. The article also addresses the potential limitations of such methods in dynamic learning environments and suggests a balanced integration with modern pedagogical tools.

Keywords: Technical Japanese, language teaching, conservative methods, grammartranslation, kanji learning, language pedagogy.

1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving field of language education, various teaching approaches have emerged to meet the diverse needs of learners. While modern, communicative, and technology-driven methods often dominate discussions, there remains value in exploring conservative teaching techniques, particularly for learners in technical fields such as engineering and science. These fields often demand precise, structured, and formal language use, which conservative methods are well-suited to develop.

Conservative teaching methods, which emphasize rigorous grammar instruction, kanji memorization, translation exercises, and repetitive practice, have a long history in language education. In the context of technical Japanese, such methods help students master the complex vocabulary, sentence patterns, and formal writing styles necessary for professional communication in engineering, manufacturing, information technology, and scientific research.

For example, engineers working with Japanese companies must be able to interpret detailed specifications, draft reports using standardized expressions, and accurately understand technical manuals and safety protocols—all tasks where precision is critical.

Moreover, technical Japanese is characterized by its high density of specialized kanji, formal expressions, and industry-specific terminology, often differing significantly from colloquial language. Conservative methods equip learners with the tools to navigate these challenges, fostering not only linguistic competence but also analytical thinking, attention to detail, and the ability to engage with complex written texts.

Despite the increasing popularity of interactive and task-based learning approaches, there is a growing recognition of the need for balanced methodologies that address the specific requirements of technical language learners. Conservative methods, when thoughtfully applied, can complement modern techniques by providing a solid linguistic foundation upon which more advanced communicative skills can be built.

This article aims to examine the core elements of conservative teaching methods for technical Japanese, assess their effectiveness in fostering professional language competence, and explore how they can be integrated into contemporary educational programs. By shedding light on these traditional approaches, we seek to encourage educators, curriculum designers, and learners to consider their potential value in technical language training, particularly for fields where accuracy and formality are non-negotiable.

2. The Rationale for Conservative Methods

Conservative teaching methods emphasize structured learning, rule-based understanding, and incremental knowledge acquisition. In the context of technical Japanese, where precision and clarity are essential, these methods can help learners build a strong linguistic foundation. Key reasons for using conservative approaches include:

- Accuracy over Fluency: In technical fields, misunderstanding a term or misinterpreting a document can lead to serious errors. Conservative methods help ensure precise comprehension and correct usage of specialized terminology.
- **Deep Understanding of Grammar**: Traditional grammar-focused instruction ensures that students comprehend sentence structures, honorifics, and particles, which are crucial in formal technical communication.
- **Memorization of Core Vocabulary**: Learning key kanji, technical terms, and fixed expressions is critical for engineers working with Japanese documentation or collaborating with Japanese teams.
- **Systematic Progression**: Conservative approaches often follow a well-defined curriculum that builds knowledge step by step, which is particularly important when mastering complex technical language.

3. Core Conservative Teaching Methods

3.1. Grammar-Translation Method

One of the oldest and most conservative methods, the grammar-translation approach involves detailed analysis of Japanese grammar rules, sentence structures, and translation of texts. In technical Japanese, this method is useful for understanding manuals, patents, and research papers. For example, students may translate excerpts from engineering texts, ensuring comprehension of passive constructions, conditional forms, and technical vocabulary.

3.2. Repetitive Drills and Pattern Practice

Conservative methods emphasize rote learning through repetitive drills. In technical Japanese, this might involve practicing fixed expressions such as 「~の目的は…である」 ("The purpose of ... is ..."), or 「~を解決するために」 ("in order to solve ..."). Drills help students internalize key phrases used in reports, specifications, and discussions.

3.3. Kanji Memorization Techniques

Technical Japanese often involves complex kanji compounds. Conservative teaching methods encourage systematic kanji memorization using stroke order, radicals, and example words. For instance, engineering students may focus on kanji such as 設計 (design), 製造 (manufacture), and 分析 (analysis), ensuring they can recognize and write these characters accurately.

3.4. Dictation and Copying Exercises

Copying technical texts, diagrams with labels, and sample sentences helps reinforce structure and vocabulary. Dictation exercises, where students listen to technical passages and write them down, develop listening comprehension and accuracy.

3.5. Structured Textbook Learning

Conservative methods rely heavily on textbooks that provide clear explanations of grammar, usage rules, and technical vocabulary lists. Textbooks such as "日本語能力 試験対応技術日本語" ("Technical Japanese for the JLPT") or specialized materials for engineering fields serve as core resources in such curricula.

4. Benefits of Conservative Methods in Technical Japanese Instruction

Despite being considered traditional, conservative methods offer several advantages:

• **Precision and Clarity**: Technical language demands accuracy, and conservative methods promote careful study of grammar and vocabulary.

- Long-Term Retention: Memorization and repetition lead to stronger memory retention, which is valuable for learning kanji and complex technical terms.
- **Structured Progression**: Conservative curricula often follow a logical sequence, reducing cognitive overload and ensuring solid foundational knowledge.
- **Preparedness for Formal Contexts**: Technical communication in Japanese frequently occurs in formal settings, where conservative methods prepare students for polite, accurate expression.
- **Emphasis on Reading and Writing**: For engineers and researchers who primarily use written Japanese, conservative methods ensure strong reading and writing skills.

5. Limitations and Considerations

While conservative methods have clear benefits, they also present limitations:

- Limited Speaking Practice: Conservative approaches may underemphasize oral communication and spontaneous language use.
- Lack of Real-World Application: Focusing on grammar and translation may not fully prepare students for dynamic technical discussions or problem-solving in Japanese.
- **Motivational Challenges**: Repetitive drills and memorization can lead to fatigue and reduced engagement, especially for learners seeking interactive or communicative tasks.
- **Insufficient Adaptation to Individual Needs**: Conservative curricula may not account for diverse learning styles or the specific professional goals of students.

To address these challenges, a hybrid approach that combines conservative methods with communicative activities, project-based learning, and digital resources may be most effective.

6. Conclusion

Conservative teaching methods for technical Japanese language, such as grammartranslation, drills, and kanji memorization, provide a structured and reliable framework for building foundational skills. While these methods may lack the dynamism of modern communicative approaches, they remain valuable for learners who prioritize accuracy, formality, and technical precision.

Educators should consider integrating conservative methods with innovative strategies to create balanced, effective programs for teaching technical Japanese. By doing so, they can prepare students to meet the demands of global technical communication in Japanese-speaking contexts.

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