

Over the years I've become more forgiving and less ambitious perhaps. I feel it's fair enough to only feel like I'm learning 50% of the targeted words, and do not put pressure on myself to scramble to rewrite, and focus more on, words that just don't stick. And some clearly don't want to stick, for whatever reason.

I still do enjoy writing the words down and defining them. One of the keys is writing the words neatly. In the few cases where I have written the words and/or definitions sloppily, I can't bear to go back and review them. I've tried various colors (having read about how it stimulates the brain or some such research), but prefer just using my favorite pen at the time, usually black or blue.

Having considered the advantage of word cards, which gives the learner the chance to shuffle the deck, I have tried them, but don't like them. I think the reason is I enjoy flipping through the notebook's pages, almost admiring this record of my learning. The word cards, on a ring, are clumsy.

Since I have made many Hot Potatoes vocabulary quizzes for my students, I have wanted to try that, and would if someone else would create the quizzes! I can't bring myself to take the time to create quizzes just for myself.

This essay has almost exclusively focused on vocabulary notebooks for one main reason: it's about the only method I've really tried. It is certainly one I've enjoyed and found helpful.

Grammar Translation and the Audio-Lingual Method in French and Japanese

Peter Cassidy, Canadian International School, Tokyo,
Email: pscassidy100@yahoo.com

As a native English speaker and graduate of a late, half-and-half, French Immersion program in Canada, I brought to the table a few strategies for learning Japanese vocabulary. Most of my Japanese study has been self-directed using the internet and free Japanese learning sites with some of my exposure coming listening to recordings of Japanese while riding the train. I did take one very low-level beginner class for a few months in my second year as a resident of Japan, and I believe that it was effective for my getting a better understanding of Japanese grammar as well as learning Japanese vocabulary and some of the rules associated with the lexical differences to my L1 and my L2. My Japanese vocabulary acquisition is the result of both grammar translation through self-study and audio-lingual using language tapes and, of course, listening to the language being spoken all around me in Japan.

I have used the approaches that my French teachers employed—Grammar Translation and Audio-Lingual—and will explain why these were useful and necessary for my learning French and how they gave me focus in my Japanese language learning. It might be important to mention that after 11 years in Japan, I periodically search for vocabulary that was once very automatic or habitual when engaged in a French conversation. I believe that my L2 (French) is located in the same part of my brain as my L3 (Japanese) and evidence of this is found in my regular code-switching between French and Japanese vocabulary words when struggling to use a specific word in either language. English doesn't seem to be a part of this phenomenon.

The Grammar Translation method, in unison with audio-lingual practice, was very useful to me for learning French. I do not have a Latin background, so conjugations of French verbs seemed daunting as a student. In French, irregular verbs, as well as regular verbs, have many more inflectional affixations than English. Also, many of the most common verbs are irregular, as the following list illustrates:

Être (to be) / *Avoir* (to have) / *Faire* (to do) / *Dire* (to say) / *Aller* (to go) / *Voir* (to see) / *Savoir* (to know) / *Pouvoir* (to be able to) / *Vouloir* (to want) / *Falloir* (to be necessary)

Moreover, French has more inflectional affixations as is shown below with the irregular verb *to be* in the present tense:

Être: to be

Je suis _____. I am _____.
 Tu es _____. You are _____. (sing)
 Il est _____. He is _____.
 Elle est _____. She is _____.
 Nous sommes _____. We are _____.
 Vous êtes _____. You are _____. (plur)
 Ils sont _____. They are _____. (masculine)
 Elles sont _____. They are _____. (feminine)

Regular verb also are governed by inflectional affixations, but these inflections could be memorized easily using the Grammar Translation method:

Parler: to speak

Je parle. I speak. (-e)
 Tu parles. You speak. (-es)
 Il parle. He speaks.
 Elle parle. She speaks.
 Nous parlons. We speak. (-ons)
 Vous parlez. You speak. (-ez)
 Ils parlent. They speak. (-ent)
 Elles parlent. They speak. (-ent)

My teachers at school also favoured the audio-lingual method, which was employed through language labs or labo. In labo sessions, we would listen and speak using target vocabulary in a supporting text. Often, instructions were supplied in English just as the English tests in Japan are often supported by Japanese instructions.

In the early days of my exposure to French, respect for the L1 was evident in that learners were not redirected away from using English. French vocabulary was introduced with their English equivalents, and this allowed for better results in learning the vocabulary. One example that comes to mind involved irregular verbs. An English acrostic helped helped us to remember some irregular verbs in French for one of the conjugation tests. I still remember RED MAP as shown below:

Rester / Retourner / Tomber
Entrer / Sortir
Descendre / Monter

Mourir / Naître
Aller / Retourner / Reveiller / Dormir
Prendre / Mettre

The L1 was one of the tools at our disposal when learning French conjugations and this was something that I am thankful for with regard to my L2 learning background. I actually tried to study the Japanese verbs in the same order we learned French verbs. If I hadn't studied French and was coming to Japanese as a first foreign language, would I have had this strategy? I studied, in this order, *to be, to have, to want, to see...* just as I remembered doing in French with those lists shown above. I think this helped my learning curve, since I had a plan going in to my self-directed study. This supports the idea that the connection between languages is dynamic. Noticing similarities and differences between the L1 and the target language is vital.

Another tricky part of French vocabulary acquisition is the indefinite article system. It has only a few loose rules that one can apply, and learners must rely on memorization. The Grammar Translation method provides the platform for this, but I made, and still make, many mistakes when applying articles to countable nouns in French. This is very different in Japanese as there are no indefinite articles per se, rather one must learn a variety of different ways to apply number to objects based on shape or form. Perhaps I applied myself to this task with more confidence with the knowledge that this was a lexical rule that I could sink my teeth in to unlike the French article system. This is speculative hindsight of course, but as I write this now, it seems to be a logical reason why I enjoyed learning *ni mai, ni biki, ni satsu, ni pon* and so forth. It was a vocabulary challenge that I enjoyed although I'm sure others don't feel so excited about this lexical phenomenon. Some people may never learn this aspect of the language since one can be understood by using *futastu* for all shapes and forms.

To conclude, I will admit that I have a reliance on *romaji* for all of my Japanese self-study. Reading and writing Japanese is a problem for me, and I confess that I am practically illiterate. I rely on *romaji* for learning pronunciation of new vocabulary that I have heard but cannot always catch all of the *kana* involved. Furthermore, I should try to study *kanji* to allow for better literacy since most sentences consist of a combination of hiragana, katakana, and kanji. I believe that becoming literate is crucial to learning a language and that these skills should be combined with the listening and speaking that comes with the audio-lingual practice discussed above. I think that it will take a lot of effort to change but I feel that this brief narrative has highlighted where improvements could be applied in my case. Also, I see now that I have omitted music as one of the tools that has helped me learn vocabulary, and yet that has been one of the most important. This reflection exercise has proved to be more fruitful than first anticipated. Thanks for the opportunity to contribute this brief vocabulary learning history. I hope that it will motivate me to make further improvements even in my now comfortable existence in 日本。