

TV COMMERCIALS AS POTENTIAL MATERIALS FOR CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION IN ELEMENTARY TO ADVANCED JAPANESE

初級から上級日本語コースにおける内容重視教育（CBI）のための
テレビ CM の教材としての可能性

Mamoru Hatakeyama
畠山衛

Yoshihiro Yasuhara
安原義博

Carnegie Mellon University
カーネギーメロン大学

Introduction:

TV commercials as source of content in a language-driven elementary Japanese and a content-driven advanced Japanese course are explored. We argue for the use of TV commercials in introducing content for language learning and cultural analysis as well as boosting learners' motivation. This is particularly true now that the emergence of video posting sites has made a significant improvement on the access to video materials (Terantino, 2011) even though TV commercials have been used as resource for language teaching for decades.

1. Why use TV commercials?

Use of TV commercials as resource for foreign language teaching has been promoted since the mid seventies (e.g. Berwald, 1976) when the videotapes were still in the early stage of popularization and the format war between VHS and Beta had just broke out (Greenstein, 2006). TV commercials have many advantages as instructional resource (Hatakeyama, 2009). They are (1) short (Davis, 1997; Etienne & Vanbaelen, 2006; Martínez-Gibson, 1998; Smith & Rawley, 1997) and can be shown multiple times in class¹ even when only limited amount of time can be spent, which was the case for the elementary course in this study; (2) abundant with cultural elements (Davis, 1997; McGee & Fujita, 2000; Smith & Rawley, 1997; Tuzi, Mori, & Young, 2008); (3) rich in contextual cues (Aoki, Kurokawa, & Watanabe, 2006; Davis, 1997; Wildner-Bassett, 1990) which helps learners with comprehension and retention; (4) authentic (Davis, 1997; Lawrence, 1987; Martínez-Gibson, 1998; Smith & Rawley, 1997); (5) current (Lawrence, 1987; Muramatsu, 1997) reflecting the changes in the broader society; (6) diverse in situations with wide range of characters (Aoki, et al., 2006; Smith & Rawley, 1997); (7) entertaining and intriguing (Berwald, 1976); (8) may become a catalyst for learners' self-expression (Sakakibara, 2006) such as description, story-telling, or even supporting an opinion thereby achieving the upward spiral² use of content to move towards higher proficiency level functions; (9) often use grammar items compatible with those

¹ Endo (2005) suggests that TV dramas and movies should be shown outside class except for the excerpts for the efficient use of class time.

² Similar to the way spiral topic use (Shimada, 2010) is discussed in Oral Proficiency Interviews.

introduced in the beginning Japanese course (Yonezawa, 1999). Furthermore, (10) TV commercials can potentially be used as a practice in critical pedagogy (Fischer, 2000; McGee & Fujita, 2000; Ohara, Saft, & Crookes, 2001) and media literacy (Kadokura, 2003; Muramatsu, 1997; Nakagawa, Fukazawa, & Hamada, 2003).

2. Why adopt CBI?

Benefits of Content-Based Instruction (CBI) go beyond the improvement in language skills (Burger, 1989; Kasper, 1997; Ready & Wesche, 1992; Rodgers, 2006; Song, 2006) including both cognitive and affective factors. Adult learners are cognitively mature enough to be able to handle “material that is cognitively engaging and demanding for the learner” (Met, 1999, p. 150) which can provide “positive complexity” (Stoller, 2002). As for the affective factors, CBI promotes motivation and interests in the subject matter which subsequently should lead to better learning (Grabe & Stoller, 1997, p. 12). It is our contention that TV commercials may be effective in implementation of CBI in various levels of foreign language learning.

3. CBI continuum and two case courses

CBI spreads across a continuum from a content-driven course on one end to a language-driven course on the other (Met, 1999). If the two courses presented in this paper out of our Japanese studies program were to be placed on the continuum, on one end would be a language-driven elementary course (i.e. Elementary Japanese (100 level)) with structural syllabus where the learners are graded on their language skills. Some content is used as catalyst for interpersonal and interpretive communication in this course.

On the other end of the continuum would be a content-driven advanced course (i.e. Topics of Japanese Studies (400 level)) where the performance on higher cognitive functions such as analysis of cultural products, practices and perspectives behind them and synthesis of those analyses is the focal aspect of assessment in addition to the gains in proficiency of the target language (See Figure 1).

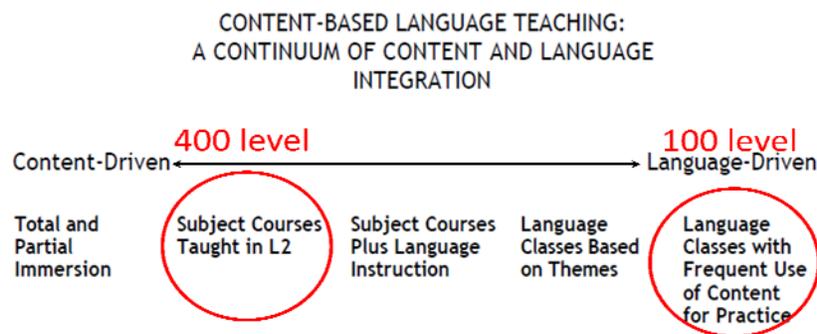


Figure 1 Content-based language teaching models adapted from Met (1999)

The content at the 400 level is determined by the theme of the course. In the spring semester of 2011, the theme was “Rethinking Culture from the Marginal Voices of Japan (日本の少数派文化再考).” Materials that dealt with various minority subgroups within Japanese culture, such as *Okinawans*, cults, and women, were selected for reading, discussion and analysis—main tasks in the course that culminate in students’ project paper from multiple viewpoints on the issues pertaining to the marginalized voices as underrepresented, but vital, parts of the recent history of Japan.

On the other hand, some content at the elementary level was generated through learner-learner pair and group interaction. Supplementary content was added with the guiding philosophy that content “need not be academic” (Genesee, 1994) but should be “interesting, relevant, and meaningful authentic materials” (Dupuy, 2000) that would allow some level of fulfillment of the 5C’s (ACTFL, 1999) such as standards on Cultures (2.1, 2.2) and Connections (3.2).

1. Implementation in CBI continuum

(1). Elementary Japanese (100 level)

In the elementary level course, TV commercials were explored as content for the various reasons given earlier in this paper, but the primary reason was that they are short enough to squeeze into the tight schedule as add-on component that can provide content.

For the fuller treatment of the use of TV commercials, activities may be sequenced as follows. This is not an exhaustive or mandatory list but only a suggested list to show the range of possible activities that can be incorporated. Many of the activities may well be optional depending on the amount that can be allotted within the overall curriculum. In fact, for this course, due to time constraints, only limited amount of activities were included.

Pre-viewing activities:

- anticipating and projecting words to be used in the commercial
- reviewing and/or learning key vocabularies
- speculation for the target market

Viewing:

- viewing without sound
- viewing with sound
- dictation
- reviewing

Post-viewing activities:

- discussion of key scenes, key vocabulary, cultural elements, etc
- composition
- creating a commercial

Following is an example of TV commercial used in the elementary level course.

The commercial was produced for Intel in 2005. The scene is set in a home of a male student who calls a girl on the phone. He appears to be trying to ask her out but cannot push himself any further after hearing a response from the girl who did not sound too excited to receive the call. After his apparent failure to achieve his goal, the close up image of a cactus in his room appears on the screen with the caption that says “もしサボテンにインテルが入っていたら (If the cactus had an Intel inside).” Then while the boy is talking to the girl, the thorns of the cactus start launching at him. He lets out in pain “あ、なんか今、あ痛い！あ痛い！ (Oh, what? Now, oh, ouch!)”. As the thorns keep hurting him, he repeats “a’ itai (Oh, ouch)” but the girl on the other end of the line, not aware of the cactus thorns making him say he wants to see her, thinks she hears him say “aitai ((I) want to see you)” over and over. These straightforward pleas win her over and she says “私も会いたい ((I) want to see you, too.)” in the end. Then the narrator says “あなたを進化させるテクノロジー、インテル。 (The technology that evolves you, Intel.)” The cactus is an embodiment of the evolution that an Intel chip could bring to better serve the needs of the human user/owner. The key grammar is Verb-tai (want to), V-tara (counterfactual) and the key vocabulary is “itai (painful, ouch).” The summer season depicted by the sound of *semi* (cicada) and *fuurin* (wind chime) may be an example of cultural products.

Previewing schema activation included asking the learners whether they have seen any Intel ad, whether they have heard and/or knew what “インテル入ってる (Intel inside)” means. Before showing the commercial, the learners were directed to watch who calls whom, why and how, then what will happen after the call has ended. It took several viewings for the learners to figure out what was happening in the commercial by combining what they saw and what they heard.

Other TV commercials that worked well tended to have a storyline with a set of characters similarly to the way a drama or movie is set up. One prominent example is the Boss coffee series by Suntory where the alien agent played by Tommy Lee Jones tries out different professions in Japan such as *banto* (general manager) at an *onsen ryokan* (inn with a hot spring bath), and pushcart *ramen* master. Equally promising are the Softbank Mobile’s Shirato family series which have won the brand of the year in TV commercials for four years in a row (Asahi.com, 2010).

A questionnaire was conducted to gauge learners’ reactions to the use of TV commercials in Elementary Japanese. Out of 15 students enrolled in the section, 9 students (=60% response rate) responded to the questionnaire. Overall findings were positive. To a question that asked which aspects of learning Japanese they thought benefitted from the use of TV commercials in Japanese class, close to 90% (combined) said the use of TV commercials was either very helpful (77.8%) or helpful (11.1%) for motivation to learn (See Table 1 below). Similarly, for culture, 77.8% said it was either very helpful or helpful. More learners chose very helpful or helpful rather than not very helpful or not helpful for vocabulary, listening, grammar and speaking while the opposite was true for reading and writing.

	Very helpful(4)	n / 9	Helpful(3)	n / 9	Not very helpful(2)	n / 9	Not helpful(1)	n / 9	Average (1-4)
Motivation to learn	77.80%	7	11.10%	1	0.00%	0	11.10%	1	3.56
Culture	66.70%	6	11.10%	1	22.20%	2	0.00%	0	3.44
Vocabulary	55.60%	5	11.10%	1	22.20%	2	11.10%	1	3.11
Listening	33.30%	3	44.40%	4	11.10%	1	11.10%	1	3
Grammar	22.20%	2	44.40%	4	22.20%	2	11.10%	1	2.78
Speaking	22.20%	2	44.40%	4	22.20%	2	11.10%	1	2.78
Reading	0.00%	0	33.30%	3	55.60%	5	11.10%	1	2.22
Writing	0.00%	0	22.20%	2	33.30%	3	44.40%	4	1.78

Table 1. Aspects of learning Japanese learners thought benefitted from the use of TV commercials in Japanese class

When asked what they liked most about the use of TV commercials in class, the topics centered around a few common elements, i.e., culture, funniness, vocabulary and motivation. For example, comments on culture included: “I enjoyed seeing the culture of Japan through their choice of advertisements;” “They were funny and gave a good insight into current Japanese culture;” “It was engaging to watch because of its humorous yet culture specific contents.” One learner mentioned vocabulary and motivation: “They're funny and taught me concepts and vocabulary that I want to look up and learn more about.” Many of the learners seemed to perceive they benefitted from viewing the commercials in terms of exposure to the target culture.

In contrast, what they liked least was the difficulty in comprehension: “They (TV commercials) were often difficult to understand.” One suggested that commercials should have had subtitles: “Lack of subtitles means we have a barrage of context-less information to process.” The script was often shown in PowerPoint slides after viewing but some learners at this level might benefit from reading the script and listening to the sound in the video simultaneously.

One particularly negative comment contained the frustration by the learner: “I felt it was an unproductive time in class, when I did not gain any knowledge from the commercials.” This suggests the need to adjust the delivery to better reflect the “positive complexity” (Stoller, 2002). However, it is equally important to stress the need to focus more on the target forms or vocabularies and not worry about the every single word that is spoken in the commercials. It is often the case that when the learners listen to materials developed for instruction such as the dialogue in the textbook, only the vocabularies that should be already known to the learners are used. In real life situation, however, learners will have to cope with at least some level of ambiguity as there are bound to be some words that they might not know yet. If tolerance for ambiguity positively contributes to the success in second language learning for some learners (Chapelle & Roberts, 1986), listening to TV commercials might provide an opportunity to get used to such ambiguity.

One student expressed the want for more commercials in class and said that what she or he liked least about the use of TV commercials in class was the fact that “there weren't enough of them.”

(2). Topics of Japanese Studies (400 level)

As mentioned above, a content-driven advanced course (i.e. Topics of Japanese Studies (400 level)) encourages students to pay more attention to the performance on higher cognitive functions, such as analysis of cultural products, practices and perspectives behind them. Prior to explicating how TV commercials fit this framework, the main outcomes of this course in our Japanese program need to be outlined.

Part of Department of Modern Languages at Carnegie Mellon University, the program in Japanese studies has attempted to fine-tune itself, developing an assessment of understanding and analysis of Japanese language and culture across all levels. Aligned with the departmental guidelines of program-level outcomes assessment, the Japanese program focuses on three main goals, namely 1) cultural knowledge outcome, 2) communication skills outcome, and 3) cross-cultural analysis skill outcome. More specifically, the first outcome expects students to demonstrate a depth and breadth of knowledge on social, historical, political, artistic, and cultural themes relating to the peoples who speak the target language. The second outcome expects students to demonstrate competence in comprehending, speaking, reading, and writing the target language as the intermediate-high to advanced levels based on ACTFL scale. And the third outcome expects students to demonstrate research, problem-solving, and critical skills through doing cross-linguistic, cross-cultural, and comparative historical analyses.

To implement the outcome-based assessment, the program further highlights four main tasks—description, comparison, abstraction and explanation—for students to optimize in an advanced-level, content-based, undergraduate course in Japanese. For instance, toward the cultural knowledge outcomes, it is essential for students to be able to describe products and practices in Japanese and American cultures. This initial stage is ultimately expected to reach the third outcome—cross-cultural analysis skill—, through the second outcome—communication skills in Japanese. In the process, comparison of products and practices of both cultures should lead to abstracting possible perspectives behind the two cultures. Thus, such perspectives can provide possible explanations of the points of similarity and divergence between Japanese and American products and practices. Through this process, the program expects that a cross-cultural understanding of both cultures will enable students to confirm perspectives for analyzing not only the visible cultural phenomenon, but also find alternative perspectives on both cultures.

How is it then possible that students in such a content-based, advanced course develop research, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills through doing cross-cultural analysis—the skills to achieve the cultural understanding of both Japanese and

American cultures? This question sheds light on the potentiality of advertisement/TV commercials as a pedagogical material. For instance, Pete Barry states:

So in terms of producing successful ads, the best strategic, creative team (or individual) is one that/who possesses a balance of logic and imagination, verbal and visual skills, etc...After the other end of this equation is another human being: the consumer. As readers and viewers of ads, we respond best to *ads* that possess a similar balance...Therefore, the goal for any agency is to ensure that every ad appeals to *both* sides of a consumer's brain/mind. (2008, p. 14)

Barry's view underscores a "balance of logic and imagination, verbal and visual skills, etc." in "producing successful ads," and thereby "every ad appeals to *both* sides of a consumer's brain/mind," pointing out the reciprocal relationship between logic and imagination in both production and reception of advertisement.

Such reciprocity also resonates with Peter Facione's notion of critical thinking, or CT: "CT is one among a family of closely related forms of higher-order thinking, along with, for example, problem-solving, decision making, and creative thinking" (Facione, 1990, p. 8). If critical thinking and creative thinking complement with each other, its reciprocity should be developed not only as a perspective for analyzing the visible cultural phenomenon, but also as an alternative perspective for finding what does not fit any cultural stereotype.

The complexity and potential of advertisement has also been advocated in Japan by Amano Yūkichi (天野祐吉), founder and editor of the magazine *Kōkoku hihyō* (『広告批評』, "Criticism of Advertisement"). In his historical overview of advertisement in modern Japan, he calls attention to the role of TV commercials that thrived roughly from 1978 to 2008—the year when he decided to suspend the publication of the magazine. Also in the interview, Amano points out that the emergence of web commercials in the twenty-first century took over from TV commercials two of three main functions of advertisement, namely, "information" and "report" on the quality of products. However, he claims that TV commercials still maintain the third function—[the advertiser's] "opinion"—better than the web advertisement (*Nihon Keizai shimbun*, 日本経済新聞 2008).

Given the various aspects of advertisement, we used for the 400-level course (i.e., "Rethinking Culture from the Marginal Voices of Japan) a TV commercial, titled "ニッポン人には日本がたりない" (The Japanese are not Japanese enough), that was created by the Advertising Council Japan (ACジャパン, formerly known as 公共広告機構) in 2002. The 30-second commercial is categorized as a non-commercial advertising (意見広告), features the American landlady named Jeanie Fuji (藤ジニー) of a hotel in rural Yamagata Prefecture. Sketching some scenes from her everyday life in the region, the commercial highlights her line "日本人はね、自分の国のいいところを、ただ忘れていていると思います。" (In my opinion, the Japanese just forgot what were good about

their country.) Then, the line is followed by a narration: “ニッポン人には日本が足りない。日本を知ること。それが国際交流の第一歩です。” (The Japanese are not Japanese enough. To know Japan. That is the first step toward international exchange.)

Fully-operated in the Japanese language, the course (i.e., “Rethinking Culture from the Marginal Voices of Japan” (日本の少数派文化再考, which was taught in Spring 2011), was for the students who had completed third-year Japanese or had already acquired the same level of proficiency, comprising ten students including three native or near-native speakers. The focus of the course are three-fold: 1) the history of the research on the marginal voices of Japan and its lacuna, 2) the issues that have been reflected by the underrepresented cultures in postwar and contemporary Japan, and 3) The marginal voices that are influential or inspiring in Japanese culture. The commercial (“ニッポン人には日本が足りない”) was chosen because it can possibly elicit students’ response in terms of these foci.

Before class, students are instructed to watch the TV commercial and respond to questions on the worksheet about the commercial. Based on the aforementioned four main tasks (description, comparison, abstraction, and explanation in the ascending order of difficulty), the questions are: 1) what information can you get, and how it is depicted? (Description), 2) Read any study or comments that are related to the clip, and compare them with the similar situation in your native country (Comparison), 3) What points can you make, and why do you think that the points are important? (Abstraction), and 4) Analyze and explain the issues you can find in the clip (Explanation), in relation to your personal life experiences.³

In class divided into three groups, students first exchange their responses to the questions. Then, instructor provides them with the comments on the commercial that were posted for the clip on YouTube. Here students compare their responses with those by native speakers of Japanese. This segment is followed by another discussion among the group members. Lastly, an article about the landlady who unfortunately left Japan for San Francisco was provided. (From the article, the reason that she left is not clear, but some are surmised, e.g., the disagreement with the owner/her Japanese husband about the plan for the hotel’s renovation, etc.) Students’ responses both in writing and discussion covered various aspects, such as the American wife as the double-minority (woman and foreigner) in rural Japan, a cross-cultural comparison of orientalism/exoticism to Japan’s traditional culture, and the clip’s director’s point of view.

Closely related to the theme of the course, the session was overall well-received by students. Some positive comments are as follows:

- I found the clip to be absolutely interesting. What was difficult to me was to understand how internationalization is differently taken between Jeannie-san and the local Japanese.

³ In the worksheet, the questions are addressed and answered in Japanese. Examples from students’ response to the session in the following pages originally appeared in Japanese.

- It was good to read the comments on the clip in the You Tube. Though some Japanese expressions were broken, they seem to sound natural.

In terms of “cross-cultural understanding” of both American and Japanese cultures, it may well be that the other perspective on the similar case—a foreigner as a minority in a local community—will complement the session centering on the YouTube clip. For the future development of this session, a TV commercial featuring a Japanese business woman in a rural area of the US could reveal the similarities and differences in the role of a double minority (woman and foreigner) in the two nations, nations that apparently share the democratic society where “Capitalism restructured every facet of social life” (Qualter, 1991, p. 3). It should be noted that the advertisement and TV commercials had a vital role in such a society.

As one of the main goals of our program, cross-cultural understanding of both cultures should extend to a larger issue: the possibility of cultural translation where the perspectives on both cultures are to be renewed. Hence the last question in the worksheet on the session: “If you go to Japan, you will be recognized as some sort of a minority. How would you deal with the reality?” The responses to this question varied, according to students’ background (nationality, native-language) and outlook (gender, race). In discussion and writing, each student grapples with the theme of the course—rethinking culture from the marginal voices of Japan in relation to his or her personal life experience.

Conclusion

In advent of video posting sites such as YouTube for the past several years, quite a number of video clips that were not available is now open to public for free. Among them, many TV commercials are compact, witty, and creative. Though the selection of clips need careful consideration according to its cultural and pedagogical value, TV commercial 1) can be valuable resources for introducing content (culture, vocabulary, etc) for language learning within Content-Based Introduction framework; 2) can foster motivation for learning; 3) can be used as catalyst for “spiral topic use” (Shimada, 2010) moving from everyday tasks to describing, narrating, supporting an opinion, and 4) can be good target materials for cultural analysis. Thus, the use of TV commercials in particular and the advertisement in general can contribute to the implementation of CBI in various levels of Japanese language learning as a collegiate, intellectual activity.

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