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BunpoHyDict: a Hypermedia Dictionary of Japanese Grammar and its Development

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Abstract

I have been developing BunpoHyDict since 2008. This is an innovative hypermedia and multimedia web tool for the acquisition of Japanese grammar. Grammar items are ordered alphanumerically, explained case by case, linked to one another, and related to audio-visual examples and quotations from real-life settings in a multimedia environment.

The central core of BunpoHyDict's developing process is the role of pleasure in its many forms, relating to Hosokawa's view of learners autonomy (Hosokawa, 2007), the CEFR notion of LifeLongLearning and the actual use of the so-called E-learning 2.0 (Karrer, 2007) in language acquisition.

Quotations are from television advertisements, anime, movies, songs, manga, lunch conversations, answering machine recordings, cell phone short messages, novels, news and so on.

This article presents how BunpoHyDict has been developed, its innovative structure as a source "for discovering real multifaceted Japanese society and its language structures", as well as its flexible use. Moreover, it will address to the main difficulties in creating up-to-date materials from real-word for Japanese Grammar Teaching and Learning. One of the main difficulties is related to copyright issues and I will argue why it is necessary to face this strategic problem.

Keywords: Japanese Grammar, Hypermedia, Net generation, Web 2.0, E-learning 2.0

1 Background

Japanese Language teaching for college students in Italy has a very poor literature written especially for native Italian speakers. As of August 2010 there exist only two comprehensive Japanese Grammar textbooks (Kubota Y., 1989 and Mastrangelo et al. 2006). One of the aims of my PhD thesis, completed in 2007 (Mariotti, 2007), was to edit a dictionary of basic Japanese grammar to offer a new tool inspired 1) by the outstanding (and personally much loved) work of Makino and Tsutsui (1986) and 2) by theories on the major role pleasure plays in the acquisition of foreign languages (Schuman et al. 2006, Balboni 2002) and their intersections with theories and practices centered on "the culture of the individual" (Hosokawa 2007).

Furthermore, as of 2010 some websites are dedicated to Japanese Language Teaching and Learning, but a) most of them are in English b) very few are specialized in Japanese grammar. We must add that the very few Italian websites on Japanese Language Teaching and Learning are translations of the former or amateurish, never assuring the peer reviewed quality that lifelong-learning and cyber education need.

It seems that no website, free, non profit-making or academic, is using 'authentic, multimedia and interactive examples' to teach/learn Japanese Grammar. Even if some academic web-sites in English (TUFS) are multimedia and (somehow) interactive, these are mostly based on 'made on purpose' (i.e. 'made to teach') Japanese Language, often hindering the (young) adult-learner to feel language actuality and its intrinsic diversity, and in so doing impeding him/her to fully enjoy and acquire Japanese Language as a 'long-term memory' part of his/her identity.

As well as the Italian bibliographic and web situation of scarcity of Japanese language teaching materials specifically designed for Italian speakers, consideration must be kept of two social factors which are not greatly different from other European and non-

European situations, viz: 1) the fact that the Net-generation (Tapscott 2009) of web 2.0. is very conscious of what better suits their needs and pleasures, and 2) that the increasing cuts in school and university research funding result in a consequent reduction of teaching hours and a strong necessity for self-studying tools.

During two years of postdoctoral research financed by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (2008-2010) conducted at the International Christian University (Tokyo), the above-depicted situation and a further research on the strategic role of 'pleasure' in the long-term acquisition processes of a foreign language, brought me to develop my PhD thesis into a more sophisticated project: BunpoHyDict, The Hypermedia Dictionary of Japanese Grammar.

2 BunpoHyDict

2.1 What is this?

BunpoHyDict is a hypermedia grammar dictionary in which Japanese grammar items are ordered alphanumerically, linked to each other, and related to real life settings in a multimedia environment.

Starting with my PhD thesis, the first Japanese grammar dictionary for Italian native speakers – even today – where *all* grammar explanations and examples are my *originals*, suited to the new century lifelong learners of Japanese Grammar (e.g. each word has a Latin character transcription and Italian translation, followed by the full sentence translation, so that it is easy to use even by businessmen), BunpoHyDict aims at stimulating students from all backgrounds to gain a long-term memory of Japanese grammar, supporting autonomous learning as well as a teacher-assisted one. It mirrors the most pioneering theories about foreign language teaching and learning as they are expounded by Paolo Balboni and Hideo Hosokawa.

BunpoHyDict is of course an ambitious project, based on a wide range of inter-sectorial aspects: from sociological investigation on most popular audio-visual and written contents of contemporary Japanese culture (a selection of *realia* quotations and questioning their didactic and political aspects), to legal research about copyrights issues, from neuro-scientific research on brain and its implications for foreign language teaching and learning to new internet technologies.

2.2 How it is used

Let us start by looking at some examples of what practical use a learner may make of BunpoHyDict.

2.2.1 Learner's Interests

The following underlying concepts will be used as reference:

1 "Pleasure is somehow the only CONSTANT source of motivation" (Balboni 2006) and there is no acquisition without motivation;

2 Lifelong Learning shows us how nowadays 'to teach' is no more about mere contents, as much as about 'to teach how to learn' and to develop strategies which promote autonomous learning.

3 Net-generation is used to negotiate and create its own identities participating into the web 2.0 social interactions.

So let us say, for example, that an Italian absolute beginner studying Japanese wants to read a Japanese newspaper (pictures 1 and 3).

S/he has great tools like www.yomoyomo.jp that, by inserting the URL s/he wants to visit in the *input URL bar*, it will show up quite (but not 100%) reliable *hiragana* or *rōmaji*

readings (Picture 1 and 3). Clicking on a word will redirect the reader to the Yahoo Japanese-English dictionary (Picture 2). Although clicking on a grammar item like *に ni* or *も mo* will have any effect nor any grammar elucidation. Other useful tools are pop-up dictionaries such as *Rikaichan* (Jo Zotero developer), which, utilizing Jim Breen-EDRDG databases, de-inflects verbs and gives simple grammar explanations too (Picture 5).

For the Italian native speaker the first hurdle to overcome may be English as vehicular language. At the moment, though, the Itadict Group of Ca' Foscari University of Venice, coordinated by Beghi and Mariotti¹, is working on the Italian revised version (with *rōmaji* readings too, see Picture 6) of Jim Breen-EDRDG database.

Still, what learners of Japanese of any native language may want to understand better is exactly how to use and understand grammar items, for example the uses of *に ni* following 来年にも *rainen ni mo* in picture 1.

This is when learners may want to turn to BunpoHyDict.

Selecting from an alphabetical list the grammar item they are searching for, it will appear the main page of that item (particle, idioms, suffix...). In this case the grammar item *に ni*. (Picture 4).

The first impact will be with a photograph of authentic Japanese Language in use (in our case a 'manner poster' inside Odakyu Bus in Mitaka-Tokyo). A green arrow indicates the grammar item inside of the photograph, soon providing, in so doing a practical example of its use. If clicked, the green arrow leads to a 'construction and example' sub page.

The main page of an item (Picture 3), describes it following these linked categories:

- part of speech,
- approximate translation,
- object or clauses marked by the item,
- structures and examples,
- multimedia (photo and videos) examples.

Under the main picture, an overall explanation of the item uses and its definition are explained, followed by links to comments and notes.

The learner may want to turn back to his/her original starting point, or to look more in depth the item, jumping to the 'construction and examples' web page (Picture 6). Here some illustrations fun and of deep impact, designed on purpose by the art designer Oishi Akinori, will get a smile and move the right side of the brain, hopefully stimulating a sort of word/sample association game. The scheme of construction's example reports glosses and grammatical categorization of each sentence component. They follow some example linked to audio clip voiced by non professional speakers, so to replay, here too, everyday contexts in Japan, where intonations differ accordingly to the speaker's life history.

Back at the main page (Picture 4), the learner may want to visit some video or pictures where the item searched for appears.

The selection of example has been quite difficult, requiring consultation with layers and experts in international copyright issues. At the moment, being BunpoHyDict not open to the public yet, materials are gathered for research purposes only, and fair use applies. Since the ultimate scope of BunpoHyDict is to be available to anyone, of course copyright issues are central to this research and most of the materials are quoted with permission of the source or are Creative Commerce Licensed.

Multimedia Realia examples are selected from all kind of media: representative novels read aloud (audio clips), newspapers' articles, manga, anime, documentaries, movies trailers, printed and filmed commercials, road advices music video clip, answering machine, automatic teller machines and more...

Clicking on a photo of the item main page will link to the 'video main page' (picture 6) which will show:

- a video clip, with full commands under the screen to stop and replay it; -the link to the source of the example;
- the timed transcription of the text in Japanese on the right side of the video (thanks to QuickTime Controller developed by Boris Searles), so that clicking on the time will replay the same sentence;
- a list of the links to the main pages of the grammar items related to the text;
- a link to the full transliteration with Latin characters;
- a link to the full translation of the text;
- an external link to discussion groups.

It should be noted that the transliteration and the translation pages can be viewed simultaneously, helping the learner to follow the contents of the video clip. Moreover, **main characteristic of BunpoHydict**, each grammar item of the text is linked to the 'construction and examples' pages, enabling the learners to decode each particular use of grammar items inside that specific text, and, if wanted, to serve further its multiple uses.

The structure of the 'photo' main page is almost the same as the videos' one, with the only exception that there is nor time nor scrolling for the transcript Japanese text. The transcript text has, as always, each grammar item linked to the 'constructions and examples' sub-pages.

2.2.2 Learner required to look and study a specific grammar item

BunpoHyDict can be used in the lecture theatre too. Its very exhaustive index of contents, which can be reached via the top banner on the page, present a list of 'grammar items' and links to all audio and visual materials where such item can be found. If a teacher is explaining how to use the *-te ikenai* form, s/he can consult the index pages to find out that the idiom *-te ikenai* is used in, e.g., video 1, 4, 7 and picture 2, 7, 9. Clicking on each 'picture' or 'video' button, will lead the uses to the respective pages.

2.3 Why use it?

As the net generation grew up, and the need for a Lifelong Learning became more widespread, foreign languages started to be acquired more by their 'using' than by their 'studying' especially for English. This is the amazing of web 2.0. and the social use of the net, where Learning Management Systems are now pairing with a more individual use of the tools.

"The learning management system takes learning content and organizes it in a standard way, as a course divided into modules and lessons, supported with quizzes, tests and discussions, and in many systems today, integrated into the college or university's student information system. [...But in web 2.0,] The idea is that learning is *not* based on *objects* and *contents* that are stored, as though in a library. Rather, the idea is that learning is like a utility - like water or electricity - that flows in a network or a grid that we tap into when we want". (Downes 2007)

As for Japanese, in the first years of the Millennium, in Italy, universities students were used to send e-mails to, talk in chat-room with, get to be friend of more and more 'real' Japanese speaking people, often native Japanese. This scenario is somehow a 'spontaneous' way to start to express what Hosokawa calls "*ko no bunka*" (Hosokawa 2002), individual culture: i.e. the culture's image the learner recognizes in him/herself communicating and

negotiating identities with others (Yamamoto, 2010) not by 'preparing' to communicate.

Furthermore, this global movement toward Japanese Language in use is a step further out of what Balboni (2006) has presented as a new dimension to the discussion on Communicative Approach by stressing the Communicative Humanistic Affective Approach. This approach is Humanistic in respecting the natural learning processes of the human mind, and Affective in respecting the psychological and social security without stimulating the affective filter and disesteem. It takes input from the neurology, psychology, and neuro-linguistics of Danesi, and from Language Acquisition Theories by Chomsky, Krashen and Italian scholars such as Freddi. The concept is based on bimodality and directionality of Language Acquisition (Danesi). Acquisition is possible only through the stimulus of both the holistic brain right hemisphere (pleasure to fill in the curiosity about a language structure) and the analytical logical left one (need to learn a language concept), and by proceeding from right (contextualizing materials giving pleasure) to left (exercising structures).

So to speak, BunpoHyDict expresses the eight shifts which Tapscott (1998) has outlined with respect to education:

- “from linear to hypermedia learning
- from instruction to construction and discovery
- from teacher-centered to learner-centered education
- from absorbing material to learning how to navigate and how to learn
- from school to lifelong learning
- from one-size-fits-all to customized learning
- from learning as torture to learning as fun
- from teacher as transmitter to teacher as facilitator”.

3 State of reality and copyright issues

3.1 Why face fair use and copyright issues?

As shown above, language acquisition take place meaningfully only if the language itself is felt as a way to express our own identity and in so doing gives life to some of our inner pleasure. As has been pointed out by Hosokawa (2002) and other scholars, even Communicative Approach of the 80's, had soon to face some problems, most important of all, of being a 'preparation' for using the language, not the actual 'use' of the language itself.

BunpoHyDict is no more than a natural evolution of the collections of *bunkei* and dictionaries with examples, though they are of course still present in it, it relies on audio and visual materials that are not 'artificial', i.e. tailor-made ones. They are selected from the mostly representative and popular products of contemporary Japanese Culture: so, as teaching materials, they are potentially much more pleasant, because they are esthetically much more beautiful (prize-winning films, novels, and poems) or amusing (*anime*, *manga*, advertising) or interesting (my own clips from everyday situations). Amusing, beautiful and informative authentic audio-visual materials, are very much relevant/important than 'tailor-made' materials, from the point of view of stimuli and learner incentives of course, as well as from the point of view of the learner's life planning and his/her inherent choices (most of the learners nowadays begin to learn Japanese because of their love for *anime* and *manga*).

Lifelong Learning and Language Acquisition need *reality*, and since nowadays video and audio are part of our culture and teaching/learning is made by the internet too, it is fundamental to underline the necessity to freely *quote* audio and video in language teaching tools. In February 2008 a new Section of Italian Copyright Law states:

1-bis. È consentita la libera pubblicazione attraverso la rete internet, a titolo gratuito, di immagini e musiche a bassa risoluzione o degradate, per uso didattico o scientifico e

solo nel caso in cui tale utilizzo non sia a scopo di lucro. Con decreto del Ministro per i beni e le attività culturali, sentiti il Ministro della pubblica istruzione e il Ministro dell'università e della ricerca, previo parere delle Commissioni parlamentari competenti, sono definiti i limiti all'uso didattico o scientifico di cui al presente comma.²

This alone is a small sign of how important is the *fair use* (the right to use copyrighted material without permission or payment under some circumstances) for teaching activities, and how these activities, once upon a time published on paper, need nowadays to be extended to internet use, since, culture today is no more only about discussing culture saw as opinions and ideas published on books, as much as culture as a global. Still, the above law is waiting for an Implementation Decree which will state the quality of images and music that can be republished on the net for fair use.³

More and more, video creation and sharing depend on the ability to use and circulate existing copyrighted work. Until now, that fact has been almost irrelevant in business and law, because broad distribution of nonprofessional video was relatively rare. Often people circulated their work within a small group of family and friends. But digital platforms make work far more public than it has ever been, and cultural habits and business models are developing. As practices spread and financial stakes are raised, the legal status of inserting copyrighted work into new work will become important for everyone.

It is important for video makers, online service providers, and content providers to understand the legal rights of makers of new culture, as policies and practices evolve. Only then will efforts to fight copyright "piracy" in the online environment be able to make necessary space for lawful, value-added uses.

Mashups, remixes, subs, and online parodies are new and refreshing online phenomena, but they partake of an ancient tradition: the recycling of old culture to make new. In spite of our romantic clichés about the anguished lone creator, the entire history of cultural production from Aeschylus through Shakespeare to **Clueless** has shown that all creators stand, as Isaac Newton (and so many others) put it, "on the shoulders of giants."

In fact, the cultural value of copying is so well established that it is written into the social bargain at the heart of copyright law. The bargain is this: we as a society give limited property rights to creators, to reward them for producing culture; at the same time, we give other creators the chance to use that same copyrighted material without permission or payment, in some circumstances. Without the second half of the bargain, we could all lose important new cultural work just because one person is arbitrary or greedy. (Code of Best Practices Committee, Center for Social Media's Future of Public Media Project funded by the Ford Foundation, 2008)

4 Things to be done

BunpoHyDict will be a valid tool to approach the world of Japanese culture and Language, but since it is mostly centered on reception more than production, its next frontier is to realize the other side of the coin: finding an automatic motor that will check the Japanese actually spoken and written by the learners... and this is what we will work upon next!

Notes.

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²Italian Copyright Law (law no. 633 of April 22nd, 1941), Article 70, Paragraph 1/bis. "Publication may be made freely via the internet, provided no fee is involved, of low-resolution images and sound files, for teaching or study purposes. The details for determining whether the purposes may be considered scientific or educational have been set out in a Circular by the relative Parliamentary Committees, as mentioned in this Section".

³I have consulted three different lawyers about this issue, and I want to thank them all for concrete and precise advice: Tatsumura Zen (www.tatsumuraol.com), Guido Scorza (www.guidoscorza.it), Giuseppe Briganti (avvbriganti.iusreporter.it) Attorneys-at-Law.

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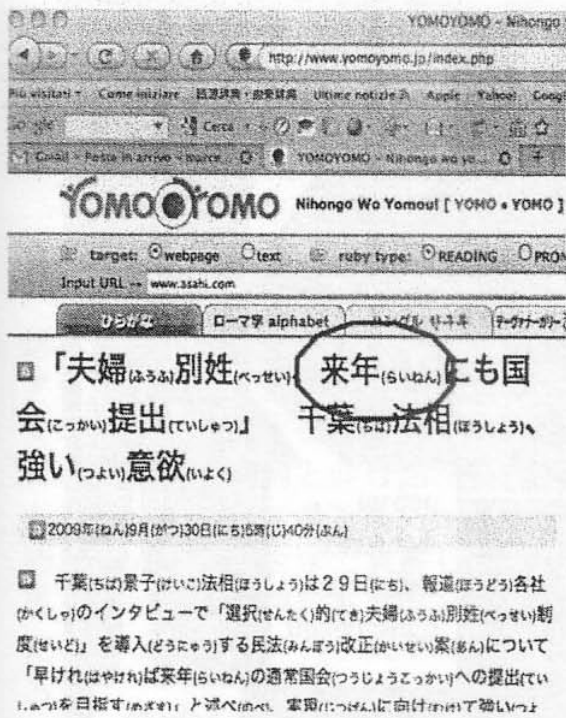
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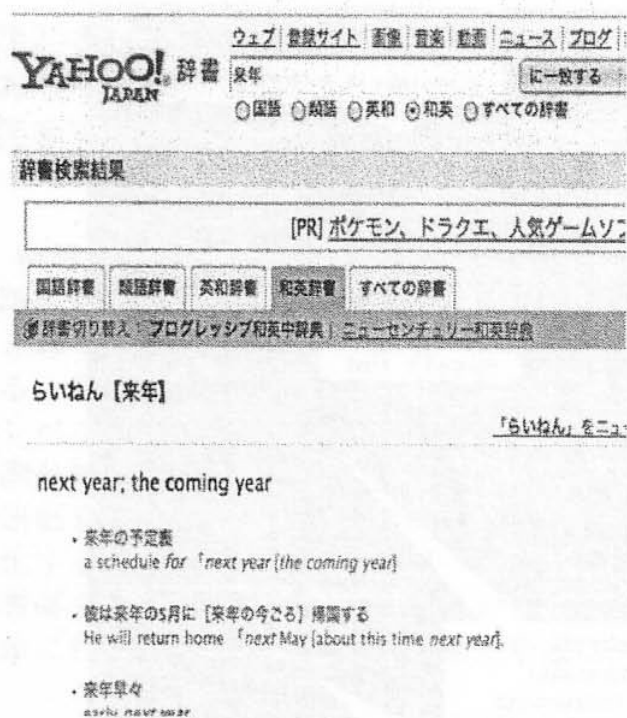
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Picture 3 (© YOMO YOMO.JP, ©EDRDG)