Digital Storytelling Project Report

Digital Introduction of Japanese Culture, JAPN 322, Fall 2018

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1. Project Description

I incorporated digital storytelling projects into *JAPN 322 Japanese Culture and Society through Media and Literary Texts*. This course introduces Japanese culture through authentic materials in Japanese language, such as newspapers, fictions, essays, TV dramas, and anime. Students are expected to learn concepts essential for understanding contemporary Japanese culture and society, and also improve their reading, speaking, listening, and writing proficiency in the Japanese language.

In the past, the major projects for advanced Japanese language courses consisted of three oral presentations and one research paper in Japanese. This time, in addition to one oral presentation and one skit, I assigned digital storytelling projects for midterm and final.

For the midterm, students formed a group of three to four people and completed a voice-dubbing project. Each group was given an episode of a Japanese animation TV series (7 to 10 minutes). Students watched the original version in Japanese and studied its plot. Then they carried out voice-dubbing using appropriate Japanese language and added English subtitles. This project served as a warm up for the final project. On the one hand, it familiarized students with the process of adding voice and subtitles, the skills of which were necessary for making a video for the final project. On the other hand, by working in groups, students learned from each other and better prepared themselves for the final project, which was accomplished individually.

The final project was a video introduction of a topic related to Japanese culture. Each student chose a topic by himself/herself, found and read resources in both English and Japanese, and finally made a 6 to 10-minute video about the topic. They added voice in Japanese and subtitles in English. Since students all used many images and videos from online sources, I could not upload their videos due to copyright issue. However, I plan to share these videos with Kenyon community.

2. Participants and Their Final Projects

Ten students were enrolled in the course. Below are the name of the students and the topic of their final projects.

- Marysol Arce: Supernatural cat in Japanese culture
- Bianca Bunoiu: Cuteness in Japan
- Elizabeth Davidson: Japanese education system
- Mijal Epelman: Karuta (a Japanese card game)
- Boning Shi: Tokyo street style: Kawaii fashion

- Sasha Stroud: Noh (a form of Japanese performing art)
- Isaac Susser: Policy of seclusion in the early modern Japan
- Bryan Yoshino: Japanese humor seen in the manga series *Tensai Bakabon*
- Quan Yuan: Japanese Fashion
- Chuzhu Zhong: Geisha

3. Digital Storytelling Project Grant

With the support of the grant, we were able to obtain Japanese language materials (both books and DVDs) from Japan that are normally not accessible for Kenyon students. Ashley Butler from the CIP held two workshops to help students get started working on the digital projects and she has been available for help throughout the process. Many students did not have experience in making a digital story before this course, so Ashley's guidance and support were crucial in the success of their digital storytelling projects.

4. Outcomes

Overall, I am very impressed by the students' projects. I was a little worried that these two projects would add burden to students, especially those who are not good at technology, but in the course evaluation, students said that the workload was very appropriate and they really enjoyed these projects, especially the final project. Many of them also said that they are proud of what have accomplished.

Through the midterm project, students were able to practice listening, speaking, and translation skills that are essential to this course. Students said that they had to listen to the video over and over again in order to fully understand it. Then they had to record their own lines over and over again. Unlike skit or oral presentation, students were able to listen to their performance and revise it as many times as they want. This gave them a motivation to practice so that their performance is close to the speech by native speakers. I do understand that the ability to perform in front of others is also very important, so the course still requires students to do one skit and one oral presentation.

The final project is a good substitute for a research paper. The first half of the process is very similar to a research paper. Students wrote a first draft and then revised based on my comments and submitted a final draft for the script. By adding the visuals, students had an opportunity to further research the topic and were able to convey the information in a much more effective and engaging way. Like the midterm project, since students needed to make recordings, they had a chance to practice speaking as well. Through this project, students acquired a deep knowledge about a topic related to Japanese culture and improved skills of speaking, writing, reading, research, as well as translation. This aligns well with the learning objectives for the course. Moreover, the students have learned how to convey information to a wide audience in an effective, digital way and have become more confident in engaging with digital materials and tools. These skills are not directly related to the course learning objectives, but they will be beneficial to the students in the long run.

5. Challenges and Future Plan

I am very satisfied with the result, so I plan to assign the same final project when I teach 300-level Japanese language course again. The midterm project is more challenging than I expected, and I am still trying to figure out whether there is a better way to do it. One of the biggest challenges is that since Japanese is not the students' native language, their speed of speech is generally slower than the original (depending on their fluency, their speed also varies). Therefore, it was difficult for the students to match their voice with the images. Most students managed to do it by practicing many times, but one group had to make the videos move slower and it looked a little awkward. Also, there were only two male students in the class, so in some cases, female students needed to play a male role, or a male student had to play two different male roles, which was very challenging for them. One solution is to ask students to only add subtitles without doing the dubbing, but then students will not have a chance to practice speaking. I really like the idea of voice-dubbing, especially since many students are interested in anime, but it is probably more appropriate to do it when the students have a more advanced level of Japanese and the ratio of male-female voice is more balanced.