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Recently, the increased availability of Creative Commons licensed Japanese reference sources, the increased popularity of mobile software, and the development of social language learning networks has given rise to a new class of free and cost efficient resources for learning Japanese. Although many are still in the early stages of development, a number of these have reached a level of high quality sufficient to rival even the expensive, in-place product leaders in language learning. Some of these new resources are even surpassing the genre's leaders in the features that they offer. This bibliography explores the resources currently available for learning the Japanese language in English and includes use-based evaluations on the products leaders in the field, innovative resources of high potential, and a number of lesser known resources also.

Headings:

Languages, Modern -- Study and teaching -- Bibliography.

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FREE, COST-EFFICIENT, AND WORTHWHILE SOLUTIONS TO LEARNING
JAPANESE: A SURVEY OF ESTABLISHED AND EMERGING RESOURCES

by
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Introduction

It is a wonderful time to be interested in learning Japanese. For perhaps the first time, new free and cost efficient interactive language learning resources are offering significant competition to the expensive, in-place product leaders, such as Rosetta Stone and the Pimsleur series. These rivals are alternately besting the leaders in that they offer more current, contextually rich content, are more cost effective, provide the ability to add user-generated content, have longer-term usability, or offer more complete portable solutions. Many resources have several of these advantages and some, such as the stunning and free social learning site 'Smart.fm' could be said to have already far surpassed even the most well established leaders in the field.

Problematically, it is hard to find these new resources on the Internet. Using a typical search for 'learn Japanese' on Google provides over 26 million results, and though initial pages from the search are relevant to the searched terms, the results are spread out across a wide field of topics, including online lessons, podcasts, videos, lists recommending Japanese sites, guides on how to learn Japanese, product sites for language learning products, and schools offering Japanese classes. It is a terribly large amount of information to sort through to find worthwhile resources, and is especially inefficient for finding newer, less popularly known resources.

Considering this situation, it is not surprising how popular and profitable software products such as Rosetta Stone continue to be, given that almost any Internet search related to language learning brings up numerous advertisements for these products, all

with suspiciously similar proclamations that they are award-winning, well established, widely renowned programs that teach languages both quickly and effectively. An example of this is the Rosetta Stone series' claim of being, "The fastest way to learn a language. Guaranteed." (Rosetta Stone Ltd). But in contrast to these suspicious assertions, this annotated bibliography exists to show that there are now numerous high quality language learning resources and tools available for learning Japanese effectively, and many among this variety may be better suited to meet individual's unique learning styles, preferences of use, and budgets.

This annotated bibliography centers on resources that offer innovative methods of studying the Japanese language. These resources have gone through a recent surge that I attribute to the influence of four occurrences: the popularity of online social networking sites leading to the development of a niche market of focused on language learning, the release in February 2003 of the Electronic Dictionary Research and Development Group (EDRDG)'s electronic dictionary files for free commercial use, the creation of JapanesePod101 in 2005 by Peter Galante, which has led to the creation of a rich collection of contemporary language learning content and the development of an expanding series of portable Japanese learning applications for the iPhone, and finally the creation of Apple's App Store in July 2008. These occurrences have all combined to push the development of new Japanese resources in two directions: that of encouraging more social Japanese resource innovations and more portable ones.

Some factors influencing this change are the availability of the EDRDG's free, extensive, computer-readable, and respected dictionaries has made possible the development of learning resources by small groups of developers and entrepreneurs, even

individuals, who otherwise would have no chance at legally creating comprehensive Japanese learning applications for lack of content. Additionally, the App Store has become a platform where such small language learning resource developers can shine and be noticed, in that the App Store provides a fairly level playing field for competing applications, the new format effectively prevents competition from products older than one year (Since the creation in July 2008 of the App Store), and the store also narrows irrelevant results in that it is restricted only to applications (programs which serve a particular purpose).

Naturally, there are also problems associated with this easier development path to creating new resources for learning Japanese. First of all, making this process easier lessens the financial liability of producing drivel, and many resources are poorly wrought when they come out due to this. Fortunately, both App Store applications and Internet-based resources are easy to update, given sufficient user demand. Secondly, having a free set of quality, comprehensive dictionaries as the basis of these resources makes for a good deal of similarity among each, and is likely to stifle other resources not based upon these free materials. On the bright side, for consumers and Japanese language learners, the inevitable upsurge in Japanese language learning materials is likely to induce more competition, better products globally, and better prices. Lastly, despite this hopeful assertion, aside from the increased visibility new and more capital-poor developers have in the App Store, developers of new language learning products and sites, especially those with a limited budget for advertising, face an incredibly steep uphill battle to make their products known, especially in competition with global giants like Rosetta Stone and Pimsleur.

Goal of this study:

The underlying goal of this annotated bibliography of new Japanese language learning resources for Japanese is to provide a useful guide to students and resource providers, but also to developers hoping for insights into the creation of better Japanese language learning products.

It is meant to represent a learner's perspective primarily, but also that of an information services practitioner, in that it aims to provide a critical appraisal of each resource's quality and effectiveness at providing the desired knowledge. This study does not include evaluations of Japanese language learning books, reference only resources, class-based study methods, or learning through Second Life, Twitter, and Skype. These are all powerful tools in themselves, but fall outside the range of this bibliography's principal focus.

The choice of what to include in this bibliography was not difficult, but finding resources of quality and getting full access to them(except in the cases of Mango Languages and Human Japanese, which were examined on the basis of trial subscriptions and the products' own documentation) was much more of a challenge. After several months of regularly searching for new resources and old ones of quality, on the Internet, in numerous databases, and in Apple's iTunes and App Store from October 2008-February 2009, the number of high quality resources found was small enough to be an appropriate number. The choice for inclusion was based solely on my impression of each resource's capability to assist learners reach fluency in the Japanese language, both in oral and written Japanese. For software that was critically acclaimed but cost a significant amount of money, I made appeals to the companies to receive evaluation copies. Not all

provided or even responded to my requests, but fortunately most of the major ones did, including Eurotalk, Rosetta Stone, and Auralog. A notable exception is Transparent Language's Comprehensive Japanese, which was not part of this study. While the search for products was extensive, it is possible that some of importance were missed. Additionally, many were also consciously excluded, including those that I felt were less useful, too shallow in content, those that lacked a strong, functional interface, and those with significant issues as to question their long-term reliability and usefulness.

The evaluation of each resource is based on extended use of each of its individual learning components, this usually corresponded to 3 hours of use per resource, but amounted to less for those with fewer features. The evaluations attempt to provide general overviews of a resource's instructional capability. This takes into account the effectiveness of the instructional methods used, the quality of its content, the amount of context provided, each learning component's reinforcement, the depth of content, how interactive and engaging the system is, the functionality of the interface, and the potential of long-term use. While the length of evaluations varies greatly between resources, the length or even the depth of the review should not be taken as my opinion of its quality or, conversely, of its faults: I simply had more time to devote to some of the earlier reviews than later ones and some resources could be summed up more succinctly than others.

While this annotated bibliography is centered on Japanese resources, a number of the resources also provide extensive learning in other languages. Despite this, the evaluation of each is based solely on its effectiveness at teaching Japanese, and it should not be assumed that any of the products and sites evaluated in this study are transferable to other languages. Notable differences between Japanese and other languages are that Japanese is

in some ways quicker and more intuitive to learn, such as in its pronunciation and in other areas, like reading, it has far more complications than most. Due to these differences and the success with which each program is adapted to them, the efficacy of each learning method varies significantly across languages.

The Need for Future Studies:

- More scholarly, timely, and critical evaluations of current language learning resources.
- Studies on the efficacy of the learning methods used in these new technologically based learning resources.
- Studies focused on addressing how the methods used in language learning products compare to accepted second language acquisition theories.
- Studies highlighting where the current language learning products' market still lies untapped, and the likely benefits of developing new products in these areas.
- Studies evaluating the long-term usability and efficacy of a wide range of different language learning applications' interfaces.

How to make the best use of this bibliography:

Readers of this bibliography are advised to treat it as a critical guide, one most effective accompanying the reader's own trial of the resources in question. The criticisms and praise expressed are meant to accentuate each resource's features of note and points of concern. Utmost effort is exerted to review each resource fairly while also being sensitive to its faults, and to clearly express each point of concern where it is encountered. As the topic of best methods and systems for learning Japanese is one of

long maintained interest and practical engagement by the author, the standards of quality set in this bibliography are high and the criticisms outlined should be seen through that lens.

The emphasis in this bibliography is on long-term learning solutions and on innovative, functional approaches. Additionally of note is that although all efforts were made to ensure that the information presented in this bibliography was correct at the time of its review, updates and significant changes may have occurred since the time of its publication. It is wise to review the contents of this bibliography against the features of any new or current version of the outlined resources. Internet sites and App Store applications are especially prone to such updates. For those resources of interest to the reader, while most are free or offer a trial, a few do not. In these cases, it is suggested that readers contact the manufacturer directly for one.

About the bibliographer - Jonathan Levi Morris

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I. Internet-Based Learning Resources:

WordChamp: The Language Learning Network. 2004-2009. GlobaLinguist, Inc. 19

February 2009 <<http://www.wordchamp.com/>>

This is an amazing site, with a wonderful variety of effective and enjoyable learning exercises, quality audio provided for most words, a pronunciation practice module, significant depth of content, and a well constructed, functional set of learning interfaces. The most remarkable feature on is likely the site's extremely useful and well designed Web Reader. It surpasses the functionality of both the popular Rikaichan Japanese pop-up dictionary and the feature-rich Popjisyo.com Web page reader.

Wordchamp.com's Web Reader, as the two devices just mentioned, helps students read web pages in Japanese, as well as in a number of other languages, by providing pop-ups of word's readings and definitions when they are hovered over with a mouse. What Wordchamp adds to this is the ability to easily select words from Web pages and add them to long-term flashcard study lists located at Wordchamp.com. Additionally, the Web Reader provides not only pronunciation for many words, but also the ability to practice them directly on page with a simple pronunciation exercise module. The ever present WordChamp.com banner at the top of the Web Reader is a little annoying, but not overly distracting.

The exercises used to teach language at Wordchamp.com vary according to the contents of the flashcard decks chosen and the way in which decks are created. These are effective in their methodology but, to be fair, mostly spare and utilitarian in design. Importantly, the number of different exercises offered is great, offering significant variety in studying. Though there are 12 different exercises, the number applicable to each flashcard deck varies greatly. Included exercises are, among others, several types of dictation and translation exercises, and a listening comprehension drill where words are spoken aloud and their definition must be typed in. Most of these exercises are very interactive, requiring regular input from the student, and this is a vital component to any effective language learning system. The ability to type native Japanese and other Asian scripts is made available in all applicable exercises, as are a number of other similarly thoughtful options throughout the site. For example, users have the ability to override answers marked wrong that they disagree with, and great control over what is displayed or not displayed in the learning modules.

An amazing inclusion for a free site is the pronunciation module, which is available for all words with audio. Though you have to open the Java module and practice each word separately, the inside of the module works well and is useful for improving pronunciation proficiency. Another neat feature is the ability to make a custom MP3 from any vocabulary list on the site. The options for making audio MP3s are numerous and intuitive. Wordchamp.com is one of only two Japanese learning systems that has a dynamically generated audio component (that I am aware of) for its flashcard study lists, and both are predominantly free sites. The other is Smart.fm. I prefer Smart.fm's version in this case because their audio files are automatically generated as

individual RSS feeds after each practice session, the audio quality is often better than Wordchamp.com's, the design of Smart.fm's Mp3s have useful but unobtrusive intro and ending music, and many of the study lists come with professionally-read example sentences for each word.

For users who wish to create their own vocabulary lists, such as according to a textbook's curriculum or just based on words and phrases of special interest to the user, the options for creating new flashcard study decks are many. In particular, the system for bulk uploading delimited (including tab, comma, or carriage return delimiting) study data is excellently conceived and functions well, although mastering the parameters used require a slight learning curve. A nice feature is that after uploading lists in .txt format, users are taken to an interim screen where a nice interface allows for changing them before they are saved and uploaded. The system seems to have a max of creating only about 200 individual flashcards at a time, so lists longer than this need to be segmented. All uploaded files are required to be imported as text files in UTF-8 format, which I feel is a good choice of format, since it is reliable and relatively simple to work with. Even for those who want the data manipulation functionality of a spreadsheet, most data can be copied and pasted easily from a spreadsheet to the text file format. The system for creating flashcards individually is also nicely designed for the most part. Words typed in bring up a predictive list of terms from the site's database and example sentences with their audio added, if they are available. Only slightly problematic is the number of questionably reliable, often unintelligible or incomplete user-generated data that comes up in this predictive list.

There are many thousands of flashcard decks in different languages already available at Wordchamp.com. For Japanese alone there appear to be several thousand. Doing a search for Japanese sets in English by the word 'Kanji' in the title alone turned up 1430 separate decks, a substantial number. (Note: 'Kanji' literally means 'Chinese characters' and refers to the bulk of the Japanese writing system used today, which was adopted from China to represent spoken Japanese over a thousand years ago. It does not include the Japanese syllabaries of Hiragana and Katakana that are derived from Kanji, but it does include a few characters unique to Japan, such as 勇 and 徑. To illustrate the difference between the three different Japanese writing systems, 又, ノ, バ, ヒ, ヒ° are Hiragana characters, ㊦, ㊧, ㊨, ㊩, ㊪ are Katakana characters, and 味, 麓, 階, 瀉, 噲 are Kanji characters, each set having the same five sounds of 'Ka,' 'Ki,' 'Ku,' 'Ke,' and 'Ko'.)

Returning to the Wordchamp's flashcard decks, only about 10, having less than 200 words total, are part of the site's 'Core' Japanese collection, which is apparently the only collection authoritatively generated from Wordchamp itself. Comparatively, Smart.fm offers a core Japanese collection containing 6,000 unique words. Though all other decks available at Wordchamp.com appear to be user-generated, the site is undergirded by the EDRDG's JMdict dictionary and a collection of over 280,000 natively produced audio recordings, both of which are usually employed in the creation of new flashcards. Unfortunately, there is also rampant redundancy among the flashcard decks, and due to this it is hard to get a real sense of what the depth of Wordchamp's collection is.

This is the site's only major flaw, its search functionality. The interface for finding sets of flashcards relies on lists generated by their popularity or, alternatively, through lists of decks generated from a small tag cloud. This is exceptionally frustrating when you are looking for a specific type of Japanese materials, and not just browsing. The site's general search box is also problematic to use. Though it offers the capability to search for words, vocabulary lists (also referred to as flashcard decks or sets), and users, the search does not allow for searches inside of vocabulary lists, and individual words are similarly not linked to the vocabulary lists they are used in. Advanced search options are also nonexistent.

While the site is free to use and only require a simple registration to use, a full subscription of \$10/year is charged for use of the site without advertisements and for unlimited use of the Adaptive Recall feature. Happily for free users, the advertisements do not carry over into the actual learning exercises, but only appear in the pages preceding them. Adaptive Recall is the site's trademarked name for the commonly used Leitner spaced repetition system (based on the learning system devised by Sebastian Leitner) combined with the functionality to add multiple flashcard decks together and use them as one. Free users are only allowed to study 50 flashcards a day using this system.

Sutherland, Andrew. Quizlet. 29 March 2009. Brainflare, Inc. 29 March 2009.

[<http://quizlet.com/>](http://quizlet.com/)

Quizlet is a surprisingly well thought out, free, Web-based social studying tool. Features include a well crafted and fun collection of learning activities, a large collection of user generated Japanese learning study sets, professional-looking

automatically generating quizzes, extremely functional data importing and exporting capability, and numerous intuitive options available throughout the site. The interfaces for the learning applications are relatively small and simple, offering few frills such as sound or pictures of content, but they are well designed and effective at teaching.

Especially effective in the learning applications is their interactivity: most of them require users to type in answers, and this works especially well for Japanese. Although it might be beneficial to see the capabilities added to make learning games full screen and to add audio to flashcards, I think they are already well suited for effective long-term learning. Although there are a number of small advertisements on the site, even on the learning screens, thanks to the color scheme and the advertisements' size, they are not distracting.

Quizlet's Japanese study sets exist for a wide range of topics including general and specific vocabulary, preparation for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, and those meant to complement textbooks (Genki etc.). Although it is not primarily a tool for learning Japanese, there are several thousand individual, user-generated sets available for the language. The systems for finding flashcard sets, offering both a simple search bar and a nicely organized page for browsing topics, are easy to use. One negative about the flashcards is that in Quizlet's they are only dual-sided, and this presents a slight challenge to Japanese flashcard creation, since each vocabulary term has three components (Kanji, reading, and meaning). Overall, Quizlet offers a nice variety of feature-rich and well functioning tools for learning Japanese.

Lang-8. 30 March 2009. Lang-8, Inc. 30 March 2009. <<http://lang-8.com/>>

This site provides users with a well functioning system to practice their writing of Japanese (as well as many other languages) and have it edited by native speakers. This arrangement is reciprocal, and all users are expected to help edit in their native language the writing of others learning that language. Lang-8 is particularly well supported for Japanese study, both technically and in the number of active Japanese members on the site: as of March 30, 2009, there are 11,500 registered Japanese native speakers compared to roughly 9,000 native English speakers on the site. Although there are no rules forcing users to edit others' entries, doing so comes quite naturally. Remarkably it becomes enjoyable, most likely because it turns out to be a pleasant way of exchanging both cultural insights and friendship.

The tools and interface for editing others' writing are simple but functionally designed. Included on the screen are a pop-up dictionary and simple but adequate correction menu. The pop-up dictionary helps editing because users often write bilingually in their native language as well as the language they are learning, and looking up words in their native language helps to get a better sense of what they are intending to say. The layout screen for corrected writing is easy to understand, even for writing that has been edited multiple times by different people. A key feature of the site is that most writing and all of the corrections done to that writing are available to Lang-8 members, although writing can also be restricted at various levels. This makes it possible to learn from other user's mistakes, but also to have additional layers of editing on the site. Users can comment on, mark their approval or disapproval of, or save the corrections of others' (for corrections done to their writing or anyone else's). Also notable is the site's tag system: since users create tags based on examples of usage they think important and want

to save, these tags, made available to everyone, act to gradually build a catalog of language use examples on the site. Unfortunately, at present there is no easy way to search through these tags specifically, and the size of the catalog is unknown, making these tags only moderately useful at this time.

Although Lang-8 provides no systematic instruction for learning Japanese, it definitely fills a necessary area if need for Japanese language learners. It provides both a place to uninhibitedly use writing skills and a community of other passionate language learners eager to exchange language, ideas, encouragement, constructive criticism, and effort. Being part of this community helps to encourage students to work hard at their own language learning goals. For anyone who has ever taken part in a writers' workshop, Lang-8 functions very much like one, but it is available freely anytime. It is a system built on regular exchange of human expression and input on it. One could call Lang-8 a language exchange wiki, but whatever it is called, it is certainly a complementary resource to almost any other method of studying Japanese.

Smart.fm, 29 March 2009. **Cerego Japan**, 29 March 2009. <<http://smart.fm/>>

Smart.fm, previously known as iKnow.co.jp, makes language learning fun and compelling. Not only does it have an incredible depth of professionally produced learning content as well as deep selection of user generated content, it has a great interface, and it is both effective at teaching and motivating long-term learning. Aside from having a solid and smoothly operating overall system, Smart.fm does this by making great use of competition and accountability among users. Although those who just wish to study can completely ignore competing in the site's overall rankings, the transparency of users'

complete and day-to-day study data encourages users to keep up their efforts, especially if they have established friendships with the site's many other users.

For those who do feel compelled to competitively study, which appears to be a large portion of the site's users, almost every learning component is weighed in Smart.fm's rankings. On the rankings page users compete to be in the top ten in learning progress in any of six categories. Those in the top ten, which ranks by the week, month, or all time rankings, treat language learning as if it were any other type of competition, devoting hours of effort to be considered among the best. Additionally, each member's entire studying progress is easily made visible to all other member on the site. This data is available in the form of day by day graphs and comprehensive statistics at each user's individual page. Although Smart.fm succeeds in providing a full-featured language learning site, capable of teaching several years' of Japanese language content effectively to English speakers, its use of competition and accountability to encourage motivation among users is likely the most profound of its successes.

The main learning applications on Smart.fm are the iKnow! application, the dictation application, and the Brainspeed application. All are full screen flash applications with well functioning, well laid out interfaces. All three require constant interactivity on the part of the user, and succeed at offering challenging, engaging learning experiences. The applications also provide users with the ability to concentrate on different areas of focus in their studies. For example, in the iKnow and Brainspeed applications, users can choose to focus on Kanji reading and recognition alone. The pages are also highly personalizable, offering a selection of themes and colors for the main

study interfaces, and a useful set of user preferences. As the centerpiece of the Smart.fm learning experience, these three applications are absolutely superb and are well built enough to be relied upon by language and learning enthusiasts for years to come.

Although Smart.fm offers the deepest amount of professionally produced content to Japanese speakers learning English and English speakers learning Japanese, it also includes a substantial amount of this content for English speakers learning Chinese, and even for English speakers seeking a deeper understanding of their own language. The user-generated learning lists are also notably good at the site, partially because of the system's strong interface for making new lists. Among other features, when creating new lists pop-up menus of words with their attached definitions and audio are automatically generated. Finding sentences and images to add to are similarly easy to do. One drawback is that there is currently no functionality for mass importing or exporting of lists.

Most impressive about Smart.fm is how thoroughly well thought out it is, and how many brilliant innovations have actually been made functional in it. Certainly the learning interfaces are among the best; they are full screen, intuitive, pleasantly personalizable, and adaptive. The site is also regularly updated; recently the Brainspeed application was made available in a variety of learning focus modes. Although use of the site is currently free, I am almost hesitant to reveal it: considering the consistently high quality offered throughout the site and the substantial benefit it can provide language learners in achieving their goals, Smart.fm really seems too good to be free.

Hominick, Michael. [Renshuu.org](http://renshuu.org) (艮亭.org). 29 March 2009. <<http://renshuu.org/>>

Renshuu.org offers one of the most usefully personalizable learning systems for Japanese. Among its features are a simple, extremely intuitive study interface, a unique point system that encourages participation and contribution, easy to set-up goal oriented study programs, lessons based on popular textbooks and common student objectives (the Japanese Language Proficiency test levels and Kanji Kentei test levels), and a personal community of likeminded Japanese students. Although the user community is still relatively small, many good ideas are already implemented, such as a ranking of the top example sentence contributors and the 'Genki' point system, which awards points for users' participation on the site. ('Genki' can be roughly translated as 'Happy' or 'Healthy,' but also carries a sense of being full of energy or full of spirit).

What seems most clear in visiting the site is that all of its features are set up to make students' time spent studying on the site optimally effective. All of the individual options seem clearly devised to take the burden off the student and give them the ability make the most use of their time. One spectacularly intuitive feature allows students to establish their studying history for any of the textbooks or tests included. Establishing this history makes it possible for students to easily create non-redundant yet comprehensive learning schedules for any of the curriculums offered on the site.

While the content and exercises at Renshuu.org are extensive and well targeted to the needs of Japanese students for Kanji and vocabulary study, the site is yet underdeveloped in some other areas. Though the site is in the midst of significant updating, as of this time there is no audio for words or sentences, the number of example sentences or other context for terms is limited, and though the learning exercises for Kanji, vocabulary, and the meanings of grammar structures are soundly reinforced, there

is still little on the site that actively teaches how to use contemporary Japanese. That said, the site's grammar library is large and provides easy to understand grammar explanations, and the number of example sentences is increasing steadily, both from users and the site's creator, which are more authoritatively-authored. Alternatively, as the site's lessons are all centered on either popular textbooks or proficiency tests, the need for internal context, extensive example sentences, or usage explanations may be unnecessary since students can simply buy the textbooks or test preparatory documentation and use the site as a primary reinforcement tool.

In some ways, Renshuu.org is very different than other social Japanese learning sites in that it limits the effect users can have on the site's content. Although users can add sentences to their heart's content, comment on almost anything on the site, and even add their own responses to weekly Japanese/English writing prompts, users cannot add grammar structures or their own vocabulary lists. This is actually good for maintenance of high quality throughout the site, but it also limits the interaction users can engage in. Though the site is solid in quality, it may benefit from adding new ways for users to add their own personalized content, perhaps allowing pictures for words would be one way to do this. This might make users more invested in the site.

As the site exists already, it is a uniquely effective and reliable resource for confronting one of the most difficult aspects of the Japanese language: that of Kanji characters' readings, meanings, and use in vocabulary word compounds. The rich content of the site is structured in small, approachable lessons along the lines of some of the most popular and respected textbook and test curriculums available, and this provides anyone with an interest in mastering the Japanese written language a powerful roadmap to

fluency. Additionally, the site's author, Michael Hominick, is responsive to users' suggestions and actively engages in discussions with them on potential site developments, which bodes well for the future of the site.

Rose, Jim. Ice Mocha. 23 Nov. 2008. 29 March 2009.

<http://www.kanjicafe.com/icemocha.htm>

Although the look of Jim Rose's online Kanji and Japanese vocabulary learning application is plain, it is a work of great insight to the needs of students. Begun in 2002, the application has had most of its faults nicely ironed out and important new features added since. Most notable in its current form are massive database of over 120,000 words and 6,300 kanji based on the EDICT and KANJIDIC Dictionary files, respectively, its superb learning interface, and a strong set of useful, intuitive user options. It is a learning application for written Japanese (there is no audio) that is still, for the most part, unequalled by other Japanese learning tools today. Reasons for this include Ice Mocha's ready library of over 1,500 attractively animated kanji stroke order diagrams, the user-oriented layout of the study interface, and its extremely well adapted use of the Tanaka corpus, composed of over 160,000 parallel Japanese and English example sentences.

As most other elements in the study interface, the example sentences in Ice Mocha are integrated so that they contribute to but do not overwhelm the information on the page. This is notable restraint considering the depth of content offered. On each page one sentence is given at a time to provide context to the Kanji or vocabulary word being studied. Cleverly, additional example sentences for that Kanji or word can easily be cycled through without changing anything else on the screen. Some other neat features of

Ice Mocha's excellent interface are its extensive keyboard shortcuts, a remarkable amount of customization on the learning screen, cross referencing for not only the words but each component of each example sentence, easy addition of any term to users' study list, and an easy search function for any element on the screen. Thanks to its graphical simplicity, the interface also runs very fast, despite the large amount of information displayed on each page.

The most disappointing aspect of Ice Mocha is that it offers almost no interactivity. If the site had some type of games, tests, or a competitive element, it would likely be a much more engaging and thus more effective tool. Regardless of this, Ice Mocha is still a more instructionally effective system than most flashcards, including those offered at sites such as flashcardexchange.com and flashcarddb.com. It is also a spectacular resource for creating optimal study lists for Japanese vocabulary and Kanji. Using the 'Suggest' button brings up a list of the most frequently used Japanese words not presently saved in user's study lists. The Japanese word frequency is based on a 4 year study conducted by Alexandre Girardi on the words appearing in the Mainichi Shimbun. Additionally, the way in which all terms are cross referenced and the example sentences helpfully broken down into elements, makes it exceptionally easy to both look up and add any word to users' long term study lists. The ever present and numerous example sentences provided, ranging from very polite to very funny, not only provide Ice Mocha with more context and usage examples than most study methods, they also make it more enjoyable.

An interesting note about the system employed for spacing out the terms being studied, is that it does not configure automatically. Unlike many of the other learning

systems reviewed in this bibliography that used spaced repetition algorithms to effectively space their reviews, Ice Mocha relies on users to decide how well they know terms and to place them in one of three learning cycles, alternating at greatly differing repeating rates. Moving terms between lists is simple and requires only a single keystroke, and this can be done easily in the midst of studying a list.

Ice Mocha perhaps excels the best as a comprehensive reference tool for Kanji. Aside from providing an extensive list of words using each Kanji character searched, each list is prioritized by words' frequency of use, and each Kanji is shown broken down into core radicals with each individual radical's meaning given. All readings of that Kanji are also provided, along with the Kanji's base meanings. Finally, both an animated stroke order diagram and a stroke-by-stroke panel of each Kanji's composition are generated. In short, Ice Mocha contains and shows almost everything there is to know about Kanji. Overall, it is a superb resource for both studying and in-depth exploration of the Japanese written language. It is free and requires only registration.

Mango Languages. Mango Languages. 18 Mar 2009. <<http://mangolanguage.com/>>

Mango Languages offers two separate products for learning Japanese: one is a Web-based interface with audio, the other is an audio-based course with puff transcripts. After spending time with both, I greatly prefer the latter. Both courses have the same 100 lessons of content and the same method of teaching. The method is very similar to the style of teaching used in the Pimsleur language courses: after new words are presented with their English meaning, students are asked to come up with the foreign words from the English definition. After a few seconds, the target word or phrase is then given, and

the student has a chance to repeat it. This is done in intervals, with new words and phrases introduced in-between.

Despite their similarity, there are many differences between Mango and the Pimsleur methods. Mango tends to use more variety between polite and informal speech, while Pimsleur teaches primarily polite speech. This is slightly problematic in Mango because the narrator has to take the additional time to explain which form is wanted. In Pimsleur, when words are introduced, they are helpfully broken down into syllables, spoken at slow and regular speeds, and repeated several times. Mango does repeat as Pimsleur, but does not break down words into syllables or speak words slowly when introducing them. Pimsleur also seems to be quicker in pace, having shorter gaps between words and phrases, allowing for more repetitions of words.

Pimsleur is also more interactive and engaging because it presents scenarios as if they are actually happening, and usually provides a description of the situation taking place. They seem more like stories that the student is a part of. Additionally, the audio and general course editing in Pimsleur is slightly better: even in Mango's first lesson there are occasional odd recordings (like the Japanese recording for 'Hello. How are you?' which sounds computer generated). The explanations of culture and grammar points in Pimsleur also seem more helpful. Overall, Pimsleur seems more effective but I encourage those considering either product to test this out for themselves: download the first Mango Japanese audio lesson and the first Pimsleur Japanese lesson (both are offered free for trial from their manufacturer's website) and compare the two.

For the Web-based interface, though it is an interesting idea to present a Pimsleur-style learning method with a graphical interface, the interface adds very little to it. The

only additional features seems to be colored text and an adjustable timer. Though Hiragana and Katakana are used to write Japanese throughout the lessons, having them seems useless as neither is taught until the last two lessons of the program, #99 and #100. The interface is perhaps even a little irritating to use compared to the audio-based method. There is a shortage of variation in it, no pictures, no games, and extremely little interactivity. If there were no audio component to Mango's lessons, since it is based on a long series of text slides (usually about 100 a lesson), has no interactive exercises, and the interface only takes up about half of the computer screen, it almost seems that making your own PowerPoint slides would be a better option for learning, especially given that the price for individual web subscriptions exceed even that of Rosetta Stone's. Additionally, a little grating is that lesson #4 is basically 116-slides of how to recommend Mangolanguages.com in conversation.

II. Standalone-Capable Computer Resources::

Rosetta Stone Ltd. Rosetta Stone. Japanese level 1, 2, & 3. Ver. 3.

Harrisonburg, Va: Rosetta Stone Ltd., 2008.

Rosetta Stone's software for learning Japanese is, without question, an expensively produced, highly polished, and visually engaging product. Its features include high quality photographs, native speech, voice recognition, an intuitive, user friendly interface, a spaced repetition system, and a number of effective learning activities. The primary draw of the Rosetta Stone learning system is that it circumvents traditional second-language learning methods of using one's first language as a means to acquire one's second, which would typically include defining words and giving grammar

explanations using one's first language. Rosetta Stone terms this absence of first language explanation and reliance on pictures as, "Dynamic Immersion."

It is a very appealing approach, and it comes across as an effective and engaging way to learn. To give a description of the learning exercises, imagine an interactive picture dictionary with beautiful, bright photos and clear voices reading new foreign words to you, then add a well orchestrated barrage of approaches to learn and review each new set of words using these pictures and an intuitive, unencumbered, full-screen interface. It brings to mind the way learning might be in kindergarten growing up in a foreign country. Despite this appeal, the system does have a number of weaknesses.

Rosetta Stone's complete Japanese language learning program is separated into three levels. Each level contains 4 units, and each unit contains four lessons and one extended, interactive dialogue called a 'milestone.' Each lesson has the following 10 individual sections: core lesson, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, listening & reading, reading, writing, listening, speaking, and review. Considering the estimated times for completion of each section listed, that do appear to be accurate, each lesson has 110 minutes of instruction and each unit 450 minutes. This provides 30 hours of content per level of learning and 90 hours for the entire Japanese series. Purchasing the series for an individual with the manufacturer's guarantee (only available when buying directly from Rosetta Stone), and via the most cost efficient way, buying all three levels at once, is \$549.00. At this price, which is at the top of the personal language learning product price range, each hour of using the Rosetta Stone software to learn Japanese, without any repeat usage, is \$6.10 an hour. Additionally, this rate does not include the mp3 audio

practice CDs, which are included with the set, and which I did not have access to in my evaluation.

Given this total, it is natural to compare the Rosetta Stone software to other methods of 90 hours of Japanese instruction, but this comparison needs to be done carefully. Interactive software can be, at its best, an engaging, relatively economical learning method providing quick, systematic reinforcement and if it is enjoyable, even an impetus to memorize, but they are also products, usually based on one underlying teaching methodology. This method may or may not work for any given student. This said, Rosetta Stone does a good job for the most part by reaching students at a very core, perhaps atavistic level, that of tying visual imagery to meaning. Additionally, the learning modules are striking and the overall design of each page is elegant. Each component on the page fits smoothly into the visual layout and the operation of each learning exercise is straightforward and intuitively navigated, though it does feel clunky to need to use a mouse to answer most questions, and not to be able to enter Japanese text in the dictation exercises. The photos used are bright, cheery, and almost un-lifelike at times for their lack of flaws. Only occasionally did I encounter ones that seemed chosen for their visual impression than for evoking clear semantic meanings. Additionally, the pictures, being on every page of every learning module and being so globally cheery, do get a bit tiresome to look at and learn through after a while.

The voice recognition is surprisingly good. When the user is given a sentence to say, the words spoken appear on the screen individually in bright white print if correct and in darker print if mistakes are made. It is not faultless though. Even at the voice recognition's highest precision setting, I found I could still regularly exchange the vowel

sounds in words, such as in using matsu-'to wait' instead of motsu-'to hold,' and still be registered as correct, but this is a small qualm. The recognition system works well for the most part and seeing what you say as you say it is a nice feature.

One small problem encountered is that whenever a word or phrase is spoken correctly, and the native speaker repeats it back to you to model the correct pronunciation, there is no time to repeat it after them before the question is asked aloud. There are a few other cases where the pacing of the speech was less than optimal in the exercises too, such as in the reading sections, which are very confusing. Most dissatisfying about Rosetta Stone's audio is that the entire three level series is done in an unnaturally slow and overly articulated fashion, and there is no way to speed it up. The voices are clear, easy to hear, and are done by native speakers, but they are very different from how normal Japanese is spoken, or what a learner would hear from Japanese people in Japan. If there were two models of voices available, one slow for learning how to hear each syllable is pronounced, and one at regular speed for learning how the language is actually spoken in everyday speech, the program would be significantly better. As it is, this is a great stumbling point in the Rosetta Stone system that fails to adequately prepare students to comprehend authentic spoken Japanese.

Another point of issue is that, despite the program's unrelenting dependence on pictures and picture comic-strips to explain meaning, there are almost no Japan-specific pictures used. Considering the cost of this software, one would expect a wonderful array of pictures representing the Japanese culture. Similarly, the vocabulary learned through Rosetta Stone Japanese 1, 2, & 3 is also non-specific to Japan (Exotic Japanese foods like Katsudon, for example are not in the curriculum, despite its being as common in Japan as

fried chicken is in the United States). Even the context given is generic and has no relation to Japan. Even the most basic of Japanese cultural words, Geisha, 'Karaoke,' and 'Sushi' are not found even once in the 3-level series. Although the novel premise of Rosetta Stone series is obviously compelling to second language learners, the course's complete lack in cultural content, which is the reason most students take up a new language, is likely to disappoint many students using the programs. This could feasibly affect students' motivation to continue learning, or at least through the Rosetta Stone series.

A counterargument to this might be that it is more important to learn the basic elements of a language, by which learning of a country's culture can be done by other methods, or even firsthand. To this I could agree, though language acquisition bereft of cultural insight is not appealing to me. I would additionally add that even when completing the full Rosetta Stone Japanese 1, 2, & 3 course, students are not provided the literacy sufficient to read even a Japanese menu, the listening comprehension sufficient to understand conversation at a normal speed and intonation, or an understanding of casual models of spoken Japanese sufficient to interact with Japanese peers in normal conversation. The first two issues are mentioned later, but as for interacting with peers, the series teaches students exclusively the polite form of Japanese: the '-masu/desu' form of conjugation. Although this is a regular starting point for most Japanese courses, since it is the safest to use for beginners, the Rosetta Stone course does not venture into teaching either the regularly used casual form of verbs or the very polite/humble forms.

Looking through the Rosetta Stone advertisements or on their website, there is no information available showing the number or level of vocabulary terms, grammar points,

or Japanese characters taught in the series. Neither can this information be found explicitly stated in the program itself or in its documentation. This is suspect, considering that it makes it impossible for customers or even users who have used it to quantifiably compare the Rosetta Stone Japanese learning system to other learning programs. But, from extensively working with all three levels of the program, I can offer at least some confident impressions of its content.

First, the two Japanese syllabary systems, Hiragana (composed of 46 symbols) and Katakana (composed of 45 symbols), do seem to be covered in their entirety through the series. Secondly, by looking at the final reading exercise in the series (Level 3, unit 4, lesson 4), it can be determined that of the six kanji taught (囋-'Right,' 侷-'Left,' 帛-'Learn,' 欄-'Exam' or 'School,' 鯨-'Electricity,' and 懿-'Wait'), four are at the Japanese first grade elementary school level, one is at the second grade level, and the last is at the third grade level. Given that there are 6 characters learned in every reading module, making 24 per unit and 96 per language level, there are 288 characters covered in the entire series. Subtracting the 91 characters of the two Japanese syllabary systems taught, there remain only 197 kanji characters taught in the entire 3-level Rosetta Stone series. Considering that literacy in Japanese is possessing comprehension of the 1,945 'joyous' or daily use kanji, this is inadequate to understand most written Japanese. Despite this, Kanji is an extremely difficult aspect of Japanese to both teach and learn, and one that most all-in-one programs fail to teach adequately. That said, the social language learning site Smart.fm, KanjiCafe's Iced Mocha application, Renshuu.org, and Wordchamp.com all do a much more effective job at teaching it than Rosetta Stone.

In conclusion, Rosetta Stone is a novel, beautifully designed application for learning the most transferable and basic parts of the Japanese language. It excels at teaching words and basic sentences, though primarily in relating their sounds to pictures. It is an intuitive method, obviating the need for a dictionary or grammar book for what it teaches, so it is probably faster at teaching its core collection of terms and phrases than most. Unfortunately, it overlooks several important issues: completely neglecting to teach any Japanese culture or cultural terminology is probably the greatest, but failing to teach and model Japanese at the speed at which it is naturally spoken is also very significant. Additionally, since the program terminates after 90 hours of use, a wonderful feature to have, considering the beauty of the Rosetta Stone interface, would be to allow for users to add their own content, perhaps as a subscription system with other features offered. These are issues I feel the company could easily and cost-effectively resolve, and are necessary if the company hopes to survive against the current squall of new free and extremely cheap language learning resources.

Auralog S.A. Tell Me More. Japanese. Tempe, AZ: Auralog, 2003.

Note: This is the most current version offered for the Japanese language by Auralog S.A..

The first thing obvious when starting use of the Tell Me More Japanese series is that the product's packaging is much more up-to-date than that of the actual software. The pictures used are the most blatantly out of date aspect concerning this, and probably the weakest point of the three-level series. Not only are they obviously over 10 years old, they are often too blurry, dark, and/or overexposed to see clearly what the pictures themselves contain. The program-wide graphics are also reminiscent of software made

over a decade ago. Despite this, unlike many other Japanese language learning products, the 300 pictures included are of decidedly Japanese places, things, and people, and for the most part, are still fairly representative of the way much of Japan remains today.

More important than the age of the pictures and the graphics seen in the program are that they raise the suspicion that the Japanese language taught in the program is also old. Fortunately, this proves to be false. I found no reason to believe that the language used is out of date. The series sticks to general terms and cultural vocabulary unlikely to fall into disuse anytime soon.

Despite these moderately disparaging points, the Japanese learning software itself is strong and effective. It is highly interactive, engaging, ties its learning components together well, reinforces concretely what it presents, and comes across resoundingly as an effective method of learning Japanese for beginning to lower intermediate students. I hesitate to recommend it to those at a higher level because, though the learning system is effective, the content itself seems to plateau at what is adequate for only short-term homestay students or sightseers. This is evident from the six final lessons contained on the Advanced level disk: 'Making a Travel Plan,' 'Making a Reservation at Ryokan,' 'A Break at an Onsen,' 'The Post Office,' 'Sightseeing,' and 'Going to the Doctor.' The cost is another consideration: at the time of this writing, it is \$309 for all three levels of learning from the manufacturer's website.

Likely the software's best feature are its well composed interactive dialogues. This is fortunate because these are also the base from which all other learning modules draw from. Each dialogue is a little like a short story that allows the learner to choose how to respond to chain of different scenarios. In each page of dialogue there is a

contextually relevant picture given and a question asked aloud by a native speaker, which is alternately a male and female. The learner is provided 2 to 3 Japanese responses on the page to choose from and then recite correctly. Overall, the content of the dialog comes across as very authentic of Japanese commonly spoken, and the pace of speech is also natural. An interesting function of the speech recognition software is that it gives only a three-second interval in which users must finish reciting each word or phrase. This does cause a little healthy stress, but it is a fully adequate amount of time and also encourages students to mirror the native speaker's speed and pacing. The voice recognition system was effective in my experience.

A key feature of Tell Me More Japanese is the cohesion of its learning components. Each lesson uses a variety of challenging learning exercises to build on and reinforce the content presented in the dialogue. Although not flashy, they do seem effective at ensuring that what is introduced in the dialogues is retained in the long-term memory. These exercises include four types of word association, 2 versions of fill-in-the-blank, a hangman style game called 'Mystery Phrase,' dictation, word order, and crossword puzzles. A novel inclusion is an association exercise that tests on word synonyms or antonyms. In the early lessons, though, this has a very limited amount of content.

Each of the three learning levels also includes a challengingly paced, native-speed Japanese language video in its final lesson that makes use of the learning done up to that point. These videos serve as a capstone to each level, and are both well filmed and engaging. Though each is but 3 minutes long, they are briskly paced and compact, each

presenting a sizable amount of information and insight on Japan's culture. There are also questions based on the content of the video following each of the videos.

Some catch points in the program's noticeably aged interface are its lack of capability to accept native, typed Japanese input, its use of a different system of Romanization than the Hepburn system, the primarily one used in the U.S., that uses circumflexes instead of macrons to show long vowels, and a more general lack of intuitive functionality. For instance, the only way to click the next page of questions in a learning module is to mouse click on the half-inch-sized virtual dog-eared corner of the page. Having keyboard shortcuts for this and other functions, or having more intuitive automatic progression in the pages would be a very welcome addition, especially for students engaging in long studying stretches. There are some clever parts to the interface as well: one is that any word in any learning module can be right-clicked on to make a context-based menu appear. This menu usually includes a link to pronunciation practice for the individual word or phrase, and often a link to the English translation too.

Though the program uses Japanese writing in context extensively, and does a good job of showing the writing of Hiragana and Katakana, the teaching of Kanji is not done systematically. Learners are taught selected readings of Kanji only through examples of their use, such as in the dialogs where the choice of views can be adjusted to show only the native kanji, the kanji with its Romanized reading displayed, or the kanji with English translation with or without the Kanji's readings. This approach of giving only the most essential readings, and only through modeling of their use is probably wise considering that the level of Japanese taught is relatively low. The grammar included, consisting of 60 points, is provided in short, book style lessons, Each is written clearly

but sparsely with several examples of use provided. The explanations are reminiscent of the types seen in Japanese textbooks.

One lingering issue I hesitate even to mention, is with the program's assertion that it is, "Developed in collaboration with the Japanese Institute of Languages," which is described as, 'The Leader in Asian Languages' and which a Web address is given on the Tell Me More Japanese materials. Although this is initially impressive, there appears to be no any entity presently at that Web site. Checking the owner of that domain leads to the site <http://institutjaponais.com/> at which information on the Japanese Institute was found in French, but not in English. An English version of the site is linked (at an address wholly different than the one given above) but the entire site is under construction, and was both times I checked it in February and March of 2009. Although this does not clearly mean anything as to the quality of the software itself, it does undermine the confidence of those using it.

Obviously, it is easy to give criticism but hard to write a quality program that effectively teaches a difficult language, so despite the several nominal oversights of the Tell Me More Japanese program, most of which are errors of staying up-to-date and all of which do little to obstruct its effectiveness at teaching modern Japanese, it bears reasserting that Tell Me More Japanese is a product of high quality, significant appeal, and remarkable cohesiveness.

EuroTalk Ltd. Talk Now! Japanese. London: EuroTalk Interactive, 2003.

EuroTalk Ltd. World Talk Japanese. London: EuroTalk Interactive, 2003.

Note: These are the most recent editions of both programs from Eurotalk as of this writing.

Testing these programs out, I found myself studying for longer than I had planned and just playing for the fun and challenge of each level, even at learning levels redundant to me. This is probably a good sign of Eurotalk's appeal. The system used for teaching Japanese in the series is unique: there are no textbook-style lessons or explanations, just a large variety of games and interactive exercises, which are predominantly word-based in Talk Now! and phrase-based in World Talk.

The beginning level program Talk Now and the intermediate level World Talk resemble Rosetta Stone in their dependence on images to convey meaning, but excel in the interactivity and fun of their learning exercises. The Eurotalk software similarly also uses stock photos instead of Japan-specific ones, but it is more understandable to find in this product, since it is much less expensive. At about \$30 for each level, it is an economy language course, but regardless of cost, it is a fun, high-quality, well designed, full featured and, most importantly, effective program for studying Japanese. It succeeds especially at engaging students because each component used to teach actively involves the student. The spoken Japanese used is of very high quality and is spoken at a natural speed. The programs also have a unique sense of humor and playfulness to them, such as the numbers game on the World Talk CD-ROM where correct answers are awarded with random make believe prizes and the enthusiastic praises given to all right answers.

The interface for both programs is very similar. It is simple in design and intuitively laid out. There are no excess buttons or labels, but all that is needed is there. The interface is full screen and has almost no distracting elements. While some may find

the programs' design excessively simple and its animations a little cutesy, others are likely to see them as having an appealing character. All written definitions, help files, and labels in the programs can be set to the native written scripts of any of over 60 different languages (over 110 for the Talk Now! program) in addition to English.

Though the types of exercises and activities vary somewhat between the two programs, both seem to focus on building connections from representative images to spoken Japanese, much like the Rosetta Stone series. Gradually the words become phrases and the phrases more complex as the student progresses. Pronunciation exercises available throughout both programs and are simple but well-designed and functional. Written Japanese is not taught in these programs, but it is used to some extent in both. Talk Now! includes written Japanese labels in the word practice sections, each having readings in Kanji/Hiragana, roman characters for the Japanese pronunciation, and English (or the student's chosen language). World Talk has a number of activities that use Hiragana-based Japanese, including a sentence construction exercise, but instructions on how characters are written or pronounced individually appears completely absent from both programs.

Differences between the two programs, aside from their beginning and intermediate levels of content, include different selections of games and different comprehensive review exercises. Talk Now! uses a fun Memory-game type activity for its comprehensive review, and World Talk uses a TV quiz show game for the same purpose. World Talk also includes a set of six read-aloud stories with worksheets, and a 12 dialogue pronunciation practice exercise to reinforce learning. Additionally, Talk

Now! includes downloadable Mp3 versions of all its audio, each nicely spoken by both male and female native Japanese speakers.

Brak Software. Human Japanese. Ver. 2.0.4. 2007.

<<http://www.humanjapanese.com/home.html>>

This program has a very attractive interface and an unusually approachable writing style. It carries the benefits of a well organized, attractively written and stylized book on the Japanese language combined with interactive exercises and high quality audio files (done by a Japanese female native speaker for the most part). Although the course is not a deep, it offers an exquisitely described introduction to the Japanese language, including helpful explanations of history's role in the language, engaging cultural notes, beautiful pictures, frequently clever explanations of grammar, beginner-oriented games, and a very casually paced Hiragana and Katakana instruction. The usage notes are very useful for beginners and are written in such a way that they make sense easily.

In all, there are 500 pages, or individual screens, of content in Human Japanese 2.0, divided into 40 lessons and 6 culture-oriented lessons. The reviews are accomplished through the use of four different types of games. One is a Memory-style matching game which tests users' ability to connect an English syllable to the corresponding hiragana or katakana character. Occasionally, there are also short multiple choice quizzes on the content of a lesson, but this is rare. On the windows version of the software, there is a clever sidebar dictionary where users can look up any words taught in the software. There is also a search function on the iPhone version, but this is less useful.

The second game is a multiple choice vocabulary game, of which there are 23 throughout the program. Each is typically based on a group of (usually between 10 and 25) similar terms. This game is simple, fun, and fast paced. There are four choices given in English for each Japanese word that comes up, which is both pronounced aloud and written in either hiragana or katakana. This game can also be reversed to English->Japanese, where all of the answers are written in hiragana/katakana. Somewhat frustrating in this game is that the multiple choice quizzes lack a set end point; they just keep repeating. It would be helpful if the words for each lesson were sectionalized and had scores and stopping points for each section completed. This would encourage learners to play longer in order to improve upon their scores.

The third game is quite unique. This is another multiple-choice game but has different content and a slightly different format. What it tests are the correct conjugations of five verb and adjective endings according to the underlined sections of an example English sentence. Each of the five of these quizzes tests a common construction including, the copula 'desu,' 'i' adjective endings, optatives, the progressive tense, and 'masu' verb endings. A credit to the software creator's ingenuity, this game effectively reinforces a simple but important area of beginning Japanese. For the iPhone version, the size of the buttons for this exercise is a bit too small for comfort.

The fourth game is perfect. It concentrates only on teaching how to pronounce and hear numbers in Japanese, but it does this extremely well. In the 'Ask Mode' students can type in any number to hear it spoken aloud, and also see how each part of its pronunciation is broken down. But more impressive is the 'Quiz Mode' in which random numbers are spoken aloud for the learner to type in correctly. The range is user

determined, and can be set to test numbers from 1-10 to 1-9,999,999; and the writing of each spoken set of numbers can also optionally be shown.

Human Japanese is decidedly for complete beginners in Japanese, and currently there are no higher proficiency learning levels offered. Although the style of the program is unmatched and its activities are innovative and well-designed, overall the games, visuals, and layout lack much variation and may grow redundant over time. What could add more value to the program would be more examples of vocabulary word usage, more lesson-content based quizzes at the end of each lesson, and more integration of cultural information in the regular lessons. Additionally, the program's weak point is probably its attention to sentence length learning or contextualization of the terms it presents. Despite these qualms, Human Japanese is a fun way to learn, effective for what it teaches, and is presented very attractively. Additionally, the price is extremely low for a Japanese program of its caliber. It is \$24.95 from the manufacturer's website for the Windows XP or Vista version and \$9.99 for the iPhone version, which has almost identical content and functionality (As of February 13, 2009).

III. Portable Learning Resources:

**Pimsleur (Firm). Japanese I, Comprehensive. Ver. 3. New York:
Simon & Schuster, 2002**

**Pimsleur (Firm). Japanese II, Comprehensive. Ver. 2. New York:
Simon & Schuster, 2003**

**Pimsleur (Firm). Japanese III, Comprehensive. Ver. 2. New York:
Simon & Schuster, 2005**

If any expensive Japanese program is worth it, Pimsleur is. It is an effective, systematic method for learning to how to speak and understand spoken Japanese. It does not waste users' time in the 30 minutes required to complete each day's lesson, but it does challenge and quickly build upon the language learned in all previous lessons. It excels at establishing proficiency in the core elements of spoken Japanese. The series is also fun. It teaches Japanese solidly from its most basic elements to a seamless lower intermediate speaking fluency, and it does so while offering Japan-specific cultural insights based on the situational use of the language. Its dialogs are uniquely immersive and engaging, and resemble interactive, on location stories more than the typical canned conversations of many language programs. Users of the series are also likely to appreciate that the program, being completely audio, does not require users to spend any additional time at a computer screen. In that they are challenging, immersive, and allow for study in any quiet place, the daily 30-minute programs become an almost meditative studying exercise.

While the Pimsleur series is audio only, this is not a handicap to those starting out in Japanese. The series focuses on providing students with an intermediate level speaking proficiency that will be remembered long-term. It would not be nearly as effective at establishing these skills if it attempted, as many other language programs do, to teach all elements of Japanese at one time. Because of its focus on this one element, that of the arguably most necessary skill of spoken Japanese, the Pimsleur series is able to both cover more content and teach it more effectively than other programs. In the Japanese language especially, given the complexity of the written language which takes a minimum of several years to establish literacy in, it is necessary to study each component of the language effectively so that each can be not only be remembered long-term, but

also gradually built upon over time. For students studying the language from abroad, developing and maintaining this functional proficiency level is even more essential.

The problem with most Japanese programs that teach all elements of the language at one time is that they terminate too quickly to establish a full set of necessary communication skills, and in trying to do everything at once they are also more prone to neglect important areas. Pimsleur avoids this by deeply focusing on building students' skills in one key area, that of spoken Japanese, and by so doing it is better able to ensure that these skills are taught effectively. As a foundation for learning Japanese long-term or for establishing solid intermediate conversational Japanese ability for those interested in going to Japan, the full program is worth investing in.

JapanesePod101. 3/16/2009. Erklaren Co., Ltd. 3/16/09.

<<http://www.japanesepod101.com/index.php>>

I do not believe that the technique used in this audio-based learning series is terribly effective, but the podcasts themselves are very enjoyable and offer cultural insights on contemporary Japan currently unparalleled by other Japanese language learning methods. They do a good job of contextualizing and revisiting what is learned in previous lessons, though they lack a systematic approach, and the audio is good enough to be considered professional audio drama instead of a language learning material.

The one major qualm I have with it is that, unlike the Pimsleur language learning series, it does not force the learner to interact with spoken Japanese deeply, by causing them to anticipate and repeat individual learning components. Due to this, the podcasts have a tendency to become a sort of reinforcing entertainment for learners of Japanese.

They are good at backing up the language already known but are inefficient at teaching new things. Because they lack a mechanism to engage the student actively, the learning becomes passive and harder to build upon. Despite this, the podcasts are filled with natural, everyday Japanese, spoken by a variety of talented voice actors. These are aspects of the language most foreign students find it hard to expose themselves to, let alone in a fun way, with translations added in.

JapanesePod101.com makes its podcasts available directly through the website and also through iTunes, RSS, and public feeds. The site was created in 2005 by Peter Galante who is still a regular voice actor on many of the podcasts. Additionally the site has now branched out into several other ~Pod101.com language learning podcast sites, and a series of nicely developing iPhone applications under the company name Innovative Language Learning. Since the site has released approximately 1 Japanese podcast per day since its conception, there are now over 800 podcasts available, which are predominantly audio podcasts 15 to 20 minutes in length. These range in level from newbie to upper intermediate and also include a number of special lessons, such as onomatopoeia, and Japanese culture class. New podcasts are created cyclically among these different levels. As of November 2008, only the newest three weeks of podcasts and the first three of each series are free. All others are a part of the site's archive and require a paid subscription.

The content of the podcasts are varied, creative, and engaging. The language used varies from super polite Japanese to extremely informal, and the topics raised are fun but steadfastly relevant to contemporary life in Japan. Each is dynamically generated by the site's Tokyo staff, taking into consideration current events, life in Japan for both natives

and foreigners, Japanese children's stories, idiomatic expressions, and even events in the news. The dialogues are more like radio stage productions than the traditional style encountered in typical language learning resources, which are often burdened by overly enunciated, affected readings. Given the large library of podcasts already made, the strong user base of the site, and the lack of significant direct competition, ensuring their production for the foreseeable future, the JapanesePod101.com podcasts are, even without the other features of the site, an excellent choice for inclusion in any long-term Japanese learning system.

Despite the high quality and great appeal of the podcasts, the other Japanese learning resources on the site, offered through subscriptions, are less so. At the basic level, podcast-specific transcripts and worksheets are offered. These are fairly bland, but do a good job in reiterating the grammar and vocabulary points of each lesson with explanations and examples. This is beneficial in that the podcasts often only briefly explain these points. Unfortunately, though they are wonderfully lesson specific, they are dry, and do not match well with the fun, ultra portable podcasts.

At the premium subscription level, users additionally have access to the JapanesePod101 Learning Center, including a number of reference materials, more user-friendly lesson tools, and some learning exercises. Of the reference materials, the most useful and notable is the Grammar Bank which provides concise definitions, usage notes, examples of usage, and related expressions for 333 grammar points (as of 2/17/09). There is also a speaking dictionary based on the EDRDG's EDICT and KANJIDIC dictionaries. Many of the terms in these dictionaries have good quality audio content added to them, which is clear and available both at normal and slow speeds. The site's Kanji Dictionary

is less useful as it lacks examples of kanji compounds, and is only capable of defining individual kanji, not compounds or even single kanji based words like 'red:' 醜ヅ. The best resource in the premium learning center is probably the one for learning hiragana and katakana: each kana's pronunciation is made available in a surprising six different native speakers' voices. The Kana Recognition Practice is also especially good. If its functionality were increased to allow for the testing of Kanji and compound readings, it would add much to the site.

At the Premium level there are also many new representations of each Dialog's contents. Some of these are appealing and work well, such as the separate audio tracks for vocabulary and grammar review and the line-by-line audio transcript, but as a whole they seem unnecessary and do not add much extra instructional value to the lessons. What does help teach the contents of the dialog are the practice sections. Though most are very short, the still in beta 'expansion questions,' are substantial in depth and variety, and look very promising. Additionally, considering that a new podcast is made almost daily, for those users making use of all levels of learning, shorter practice sessions may be ideal.

Also made available at the Premium subscription level is a flashcard application. With it students can study each lesson's selected kanji and vocabulary, the jyouyou (everyday use) kanji by grade level, the four levels of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, or create their own study lists from either the lessons or the site's two dictionaries. Unfortunately, the flashcard application is not very appealing or instructional: the text of the flashcards is small, the bright links at the side are distracting, the cards have no context and there is no easily accessible way to access information about them on the

page, and the simple Yes/No interface, which must be clicked on for each card, is rather tiresome.

Although I was unable to get access to the Premium Plus Subscription level's features, according to the site, it offers 30-minute Japanese level checks, which are performed via Skype, a personalized curriculum, a writing correction exercise (it is unknown how often this can be made use of), and two office hours a week to speak one-on-one with a 'Japanese expert.'

There are also numerous iPhone learning applications coming out from the makers of JapanesePod101.com. One of particular note is the Pocket Japanese series, which ports from 5-10 dialogs onto the iPhone with a number of the features from the Basic and Premium levels of learning. While these portable editions of the site's materials are nice to have, and offer good ready reference, the interface is somewhat lacking and the only reinforcement exercise provided, the flashcards, proves somewhat tedious to use. If the interface is improved though, this could be a wonderful language learning tool.

Kumph, Joseph. iFlipr Flashcards. Ver. 1.14. 10 Startups, 2008.

This is a simple flashcard application for the iPhone and iPod Touch that is able to sync with the similarly simple flashcard site iFlipr.com. Although there are a number of other flashcard applications available for the iPhone, this is my pick for the best. It is a combination of a strong flexible interface, an online flashcard editor that allows for easy creation and importation of data, a reliable spaced repetition system (Leitner), and a great, general no-mess functionality. Several of the other flashcard apps available for the iPhone seem to fault by attempting to add too many features, which end up causing bugs

and are also distracting from the study experience more often than being helpful. iFlipr just sticks to the basics offering only simple double sided flashcards or automatically generated multiple choice flashcards (my preference) and has ended up making one of the most useful, most adaptive study applications for the iPhone.

Creating new decks can be done easily, either by using the WYSIWYG online web editor, which can handle pictures well or sound files less adeptly, or by importing tab or comma separated files on the iFlipr.com Website. Although there is an editor on the iPhone editor, it requires an active internet connection and is somewhat taxing to use, considering the difficulty of typing on the iPhone. The system also allows for exporting files in the .csv spreadsheet format, which is a commonly accepted format for many flashcard learning systems. Alternatively, the user-generated study decks are presently numerous and varied across a wide range of topics, including test vocabulary preparation, English Literature terms, geography, bird-calls, etc. For Japanese language learning in English there are currently over 300 decks, each usually having the suggested length of about 40 double-sided cards, but several reaching the hundreds and a few even the thousands. The organization of these decks is somewhat haphazard but many are arranged by the levels of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test and by different Japanese textbooks. As is common for user-generated flashcard sets in any language, there seems to be a good deal of overlap, and the reliability of the information is sometimes questionable. This could be alleviated somewhat if the decks were signed by their authors and/or rating were allowed for the decks. Additionally, there only seems to be availability for writing two-sided cards, which poses a slight problem for Japanese, since for each word/phrase there are two answers needed: pronunciation of the kanji

characters and English meaning. This is a commonly encountered problem with flashcard programs.

The most obvious drawback of iFlipr for learning Japanese is the questionable reliability of the user generated content, but this problem can be overcome by users creating decks of their own. To test the time-commitment and feasibility of doing this, I made a number of decks of my own. What I found by doing this is first that making your own flashcards individually is as tiresome online as it is on paper. The second thing I found is that importing can be done easily in most cases, and there are numerous sources of Japanese language study materials available on the Internet, including the reliable EDRDG's dictionary databases and the Tanaka Corpus of parallel example sentences. Data that is separated regularly by tabs or commas is the easiest to handle, but any data that can be separated into columns on a spreadsheet program, such as Google Docs, works well too. In this way, with only moderate knowledge of spreadsheet programs, I was able to create roughly 19,000 text-based parallel Japanese language to English flashcards and upload them with two nights' of work. Downloading all of these to an 8gb iPod touch took less than 5 min, and only a nominal amount of memory on the device.

One feature I would like to see with iFlipr is for advanced search functionality, such as would allow to limit searches for decks by the type of media they contain. Despite this, I have little bad to say about the product. It seems likely that iFlipr will remain a useful tool for the foreseeable future, considering the number of decks already available in numerous fields, the simplicity of the software (it is hard to imagine there being many technical issues with it), the ability to use a synced deck both on the iPhone and at any computer via a personal login, and the few thoughtful options, such as font-

size flexibility and the multiple choice quiz. The user-generated decks are, in essence, an investment by each user to the product, so it is likely to be around for a while.

Additionally, since this product has a free app store trial and is also free to use on the web, it is likely new many users will test it and like it.

Sensory Sweep. My Japanese Coach. Larkspur, CA: Ubisoft: Oct. 14, 2008.

Each of My Japanese Coach's 100 full lessons has a Listening, Speaking, and Writing component and is narrated in text by a cartoon Japanese female host named Hitomi. These do a fairly good job of teaching the fundamentals of beginning Japanese, especially the writing systems of Hiragana and Katakana; this is significant because not many Japanese self-study resources provide this kind of interactive writing exercise. Though the first 100 lessons are very basic, at times they do offer important insights into the language, such as, 'Remember, in Japanese the more ambiguous the more polite it is.' The other 900 lessons in the game teach only new vocabulary. The numerous games included to reinforce the learning done in all the lessons are well varied, often fun, and occasionally effective too. This reinforcement is thinnest for grammar and sentence structure, of which there are only two fairly ineffective games.

There are twelve games in My Japanese Coach to choose from by the time all are unlocked. The games can range from engaging and effective to irritating and buggy. Most notable and the most unique in what they offer Japanese students compared to other language resources, are the four Japanese character writing games. These make use of the DS' touchpad to test character's structure, stroke order, and reading. Hiragana and Katakana are covered fully but the number of Kanji available appears limited; as of

lesson 80 the writing lessons are still dominated by Hiragana and Katakana writing. The other mini games available are word dictation, fill-in-the-blank, memory, sentence scramble, multiple choice quizzes for written and spoken content, and a smack the gopher game. I found that the most useful of these for extended use was the simple audio multiple choice quiz at the hard level. All games are adjustable in their difficulty and the choice of content used, which can be set to previously mastered content, new content, or the two mixed together. Unfortunately for users, there are a number of lingering design problems in the games. Most obvious of an error is the tiny, though legible, print of most text used. Additionally, while the interface works fine, it is often finicky about character input for kanji writing, sometimes inexplicably, and lacks intuitive features such as the ability to clear when you mess up writing.

The program also includes a digital phrasebook that works well and has a deep and varied selection of phrases, at least 500, of everyday utility. The phrases are mixed between usage of informal and polite language and are well spoken by a native Japanese female. The pacing is natural and the audio very clear. For practicing pronunciation, students can record their voice for any phrase using the DS' internal microphone and easily compare it to the native pronunciation. This is a nice feature, but it is not crafted well enough for extended use, as pressing the necessary three button series for each vocal comparison begins to annoy quickly. Also provided in the software is an easy to use dictionary with audio for most words.

While My Japanese Coach has a number of appealing qualities, the best are that it is portable, deep in content, focuses on content immediately useful to daily life -including even a nice selection of basic Japanese onomatopoeia, and, most notably, extensively

teaches and tests handwritten Japanese. While the game is a flawed first offering for teaching Japanese on the Nintendo DS (in the U.S.), the DS itself shows great potential for new installments. It combines the ability to practice and test the writing of Japanese characters on a portable, durable, and relatively inexpensive device. The device even has some advantages over the iPhone in that it has two screens, which is optimal for writing exercises, is cheaper, is arguably more durable, is made for stylus input, and there are already several dozen professionally developed Japanese learning games, made for all age groups, already sold in Japan.

IV. Other Resources of Potential Interest:

Kelly, Charles. Charles Kelly's Online Japanese Language Study Materials.

28 March 2009. <<http://www.manythings.org/japanese/>>

A wonderful collection of resources for learners of Japanese, including a number of learning games, extensive reference materials, lists of recommended high-quality sites, and a large collection of photos of Japanese signs from everyday life. The main drawback of the site, especially its games, is that there is no way to save individual data or personalize the site, such as would allow students to save their study progress and a record of their activities

Read the Kanji. Ver. 0.6.1. 25 March 2009. New Orleans, LA: SquareFour

Information Technologies, LLC. 28 March 2009.

<<http://www.readthekANJI.com/>>

This is a nicely focused Kanji and Japanese vocabulary quiz and study site. Overall it is pleasantly simple and cleanly designed. It includes example sentences, helpful quiz options, and excellent pop-up information menus.

Elmes, Damien. Anki. Ver. 0.9.9.7. 2009. < <http://ichi2.net/anki/index.html>>

Free, open source, online and standalone-capable spaced repetition flashcard reviewing program that offers extensive technical control over flashcards' creation and review scheduling but relies on a single, simple method for teaching content.

Bienstman, Peter. Mnemosyne. Ver. 1.2. 27 Nov. 2008.

<<http://mnemosyne-proj.org/>>

Much like Anki, this is a free, open source, and standalone-capable spaced repetition flashcard reviewing program. Mnemosyne differs primarily in that it is a simpler, more approachable program, and is a little easier to manage for new users.

Starkey, Jay. Kanji-lish. Ver. 1. 4 June 2008. Kanjilish. 31 March 2009.

<<https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/7208>>

Using an incredibly simple idea, that of replacing the first letter of words with Kanji that have the same meaning, this Firefox add-on provides a surprisingly good way of connecting Kanji to meaning and a clever way of passively increasing exposure to Kanji. Although the add-on does have some considerable bugs holding it back, such as its

hard to use options screen, the idea it presents is functional and, given some development, could potentially be used to develop more effective Japanese learning applications in the future. Kanji-lish is already easy to use in the creation of flashcards, such as are used by the iFlipr application, Quizlet, and Wordchamp (although it can make those exercises requiring the English to be typed in more challenging). The idea employed by Kanji-lish is also used in Vee David's 2006 Kanji reference tome, 'The Kanji Handbook.' Whether this was Vee David's original idea or Jay Starkey's, Kanji-lish is a much more useful tool for encountering kanji characters meaningfully everyday.

United Portal for Advanced Learning of Japanese Language: Associative Kanji

Learning. 1 Feb. 2008. Department of Computer and Information Sciences, Faculty of Engineering, Iwate University.

<<http://www.sp.cis.iwate-u.ac.jp/icampus/u/ukanji.jsp>>

This is a wonderfully multi-faceted application for studying Kanji on mobile devices with a constant Internet connection. While its main interface acts as a succinct Kanji reference interface, it also has many other features including an extensive collection of Kanji stroke order animations, quizzes for word meanings and Kanji readings, English definitions, helpful cross-referencing to context (in the form of a list of example sentences) for almost every element, and Kanji radical information. The site behind this Web application is also deep in content, but this seems the most immediately useful application available.

Mangarama: Digital Comic Learning System. 11 Jan. 2001. Research Institute of

Software Engineering [RiSE], JAPRI, and Akahori Lab. 30 March 2009.

<<http://www.ak.cradle.titech.ac.jp/Rise/top.htm>>

A delightful small repository of older four-panel Manga comics, read aloud, with English definitions.

JPlang. Japanese Language Center for International Students and the Information Processing Center of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. 29 March 2009.

<<http://jplang.tufs.ac.jp/en/ka/1/1.html>>

This is a site with wonderfully rich content. The interface is a little old and a little quirky but these are worth overcoming to make use of the site's quality dialogs which are illuminated by numerous hand drawn illustrations, native audio, and are also full of useful cultural information on Japan. There are 49 full lessons available, 28 at the beginner's level and 21 at the intermediate level. The best part of the site is probably that it is a very on-target and compact medium length course. With its ample inclusions of grammar, usage examples, illustrations and visuals, culture points, reinforcement of words and structures, and thoughtful supplementary materials, the site has little excess to it. If the interface were overhauled it would be exceptional, but as it is, it is still worth the time of anyone who has doubts of their mastery of core to conversational Japanese. It is also fun in that it has many little pockets of extra resources stuffed throughout the site.

Collier, David. Jgram.org. 28 March 2009. <<http://jgram.org/index.php>>

A wonderful idea that seems to have lost support; this site offers a wide selection of well contextualized Japanese grammar, two helpful games for studying it, the ability to export grammar daily to a phone or email address, and an export function for all grammar terms, which are made free for external use under a Creative Commons license.

Dirk, Andre. Knuckles in China Land. 2005. <<http://www.kicl.info/>>

A novel, fun way to study Japanese or other languages; this free program presents learning through a classic RPG game experience. It employs a spaced repetition system, an engaging storyline, good native Japanese typing support, helpful options, a well-functioning vocabulary list builder, and an interactive method of reinforcing study terms.

Flashcard Exchange 2009. Tuolumne Technology Group, Inc. 31 March 2009.

<<http://www.flashcardexchange.com/>>

This is a well designed, functional site for creating, using, and finding basic flashcards. It is remarkably deep in user-generated Japanese language learning content, but it lacks either effective or engaging systems to teach or reinforce it. The site offers an application called Mental Case that allows for downloading and using the site's content on iPhones, but it is more attractive than useful for studying.

Byki. Ver. 4. 2009 Transparent Language. 31 March 2009. <<http://www.byki.com/>>

Byki is a simple and effective flashcard-based language learning product. A free version, called Byki Express, and a paid version, called Byki Deluxe costing \$50, are offered. The free version is basically a trial and does not allow download of more than 12

flashcard decks or the creation of new flashcards. The product is surprisingly plain, but easy to use and effective. Even in the full version, the content for Japanese is currently not very deep and is mostly oriented at beginners. Although Byki makes use of both professionally created flashcard sets and user-generated ones, due to the restrictions placed on the free version, the site's collection is very small, much less than that of its free competition, including Wordchamp.com, Smart.fm, and Quizlet.com. Byki does have potential: it is stylish, well-functioning, effective at teaching if not varied in its approaches, well marketed, and seems to be developing briskly.