Students, teachers, language, educational methods and new media: Where should we anchor Japanese language teaching?
Some reflections from the field

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Abstract

The difficulties encountered by French secondary school teachers of Japanese – whom I have observed in the field for seven years now – can be divided into two groups: those relating to the object taught (i.e. the Japanese language) and those relating to the teacher's vision and understanding of their role and its practical execution (i.e. the teaching profession). While the first group are often the focus of reflection and research in the field of Japanese language education, the second group – rightly or wrongly – are much less frequently addressed, when they are not completely forgotten or denied.

Many of these difficulties result from pedagogical practices that are insufficiently or unstably anchored, or from a lack of awareness among teachers that several anchor points are possible (for example, learners, the teacher, language, methods or textbooks) but not equal. In this paper I aim to propose a reflexive framework to help teachers if not solve their difficulties immediately, at least identify and understand them better, which is the first step in the process.

Keywords: Japanese language teaching, teaching profession, pedagogical practice, didactics research, pedagogical triangle
【キーワード】 日本語教育、教授職、教育実習、教授研究、「授業の三角形モデル」

1 Introduction

To tell the truth, I was a little reluctant to accept the invitation to speak to you today because in recent years my own research has tended to move away from the concrete application of teaching methods and tools. It was actually the subtitle of this section (Learning and Teaching Japanese in Europe. Why? – Voices from the field) that convinced me to accept this opportunity to present some of my observations and reflections as school inspector for Japanese language education. This role, entrusted to me by the French Ministry of Education in 2010, has allowed me to spend the past seven years observing the reality of Japanese education in French secondary schools alongside my work as a professor and researcher at Jean-Jaurès University in Toulouse and at Inalco in Paris.

My task as inspector is multifaceted but essentially involves: evaluating tenured teachers of Japanese in the French national education system (by tenured teachers, I mean qualified teachers who are French public servants and thus permanently employed); giving my opinion on and helping to devise the curriculum and set examination papers (the *baccalauréat*, for example); responding to requests from head teachers wishing to open new Japanese language classes in their schools or encountering problems with existing teaching; and responding to requests from teachers in the field and helping them deal with any difficulties they encounter. As you can see, this is a significant amount of work for a role that is not my main job. Sadly, I must confess that I am of course unable to carry out all these tasks satisfactorily, something that is a source of enormous frustration not only to me but to the individuals who solicit me.

In fact, I can only devote myself to the most essential tasks and the most urgent, if not the most serious, problems.

However, I am not here today to speak on behalf of schools or as an inspector. Instead I will give you my personal opinion based on my experience inspecting teachers. In other words, I will relate some of the behaviours, problems and successes I have observed and on which I am required to give an opinion as part of my role, a perspective that is often forgotten in research on didactics. I will return to this point later, because I consider it to be crucial. Although this paper focuses on secondary education, some of my remarks – though not all, because there are significant structural differences between universities and secondary schools which affect teaching practices, or at least, what is possible in terms of teaching practices – may be applicable to Japanese teaching at university, a subject that no doubt interests you most.

In fact, I can begin by presenting my final conclusions, which I hope will allow you to understand my reflective process better. The problems I wish to discuss are twofold and result from two separate observations: 1) the overwhelming majority of teaching problems I see are not related *to Japanese language teaching* specifically but *to teaching* itself, that is, *to the professional and pedagogical practice of teachers*; 2) research in Japanese Language Studies and didactics, by which I mean your research activities, is seldom used in the field, either because these studies do not reach teachers or because *they are not relevant to them or to the institutional framework in which they operate*.

My presentation will consist of three parts.

First, I will briefly outline the teaching situation in France based on the actual difficulties and problems expressed by teachers rather than statistics. I will suggest a typology of these difficulties based on the profiles of the teachers I have observed and/or met and the various professional conditions and/or constraints they are facing.

Second, I will try to identify the causes of this situation. Often, the difficulties encountered by teachers are caused by their teaching methods being insufficiently or unstably anchored, or from their unawareness that several different anchorages are possible. In this second section I will propose a reflexive framework to help teachers if not to solve their difficulties immediately, at least to better identify and understand them, which is the first step in the process.

Third, I will extend my reflection to research in Japanese language didactics and suggest ways to make research studies and tools more closely reflect the actual experience of teachers and to make such materials more affordable and useful.

2   Teaching is a profession

Teaching is a job, and one that requires training. Simply being a Japanese native speaker or having a degree in Japanese does not make someone a (good) teacher of the Japanese language.

Although I stated I would not give general and statistical data, a brief overview of Japanese education in French secondary schools would be useful at this point. The number of pupils learning Japanese at secondary school has steadily increased since the mid-1990s, as we can see in the following figures for public and private secondary schools, excluding New Caledonia – 1995-1996: 1,838 pupils; 2002-2003: 2,177 pupils; 2011-2012: 3,186 pupils; 2015-2016: 3,634 pupils (Foreign Language 1: 202; FL2: 285; FL3: 3,147).

The number of French secondary schools (excluding New Caledonia) teaching Japanese is ± 77 schools: ± 46 of them public and ± 31 private.

Japanese instruction at these schools is currently provided by ± 87 teachers (public and private school, excluding New Caledonia), some of them working at two institutions. These

teachers vary greatly in terms of their status and level of skill: 13 are 'professeur agrégé' (qualified teachers who have passed the prestigious *agrégation* exam), 6 are 'professeur certifié' (qualified teachers who hold the CAPES qualification), and ± 68 are non-tenured (meaning non-qualified) teachers with a variety of statuses (part-time teachers, temporary teachers, lecturers, auxiliary and additional teachers, etc.).

To rephrase, only 19 out of more than 87 teachers (± 22%) were recruited through a competitive process designed to verify their skills in Japanese and offer state-supplied educational training either before they begin teaching or during their first employment.

Non-tenured teachers can be classified into two main groups: teachers of Japanese origin (± 56 or ± 82%) recruited on this sole criterion and often lacking any teacher training or knowledge of the French education system before they begin; and French teachers holding a Bachelor's degree or (more rarely) a Master's degree in Japanese (± 11 or ± 18%), with no training and, in some cases, a low level of Japanese.

In my experience, the result is that struggling teachers can be divided into two quite distinct groups: those who have difficulty with the subject itself (i.e. the Japanese language) and those who have difficulty with the job, that is, with their vision and understanding of their role and its practical execution (i.e. the teaching profession). While the former are often the focus of researchers' reflections and studies in Japanese language education, the latter are much less frequently addressed. To some extent this oversight results from two taboos: the fact that having a BA – and often even an MA – is not enough to master the Japanese language and effectively teach Japanese; and the fact that being a native speaker is also not enough to effectively teach Japanese. Just as being French is not enough to teach French in an overseas context, and being able to count is not enough to teach mathematics.

Indeed, the term *teacher* or *professor* of Japanese – which is what these individuals are to students, parents, and often school management and teaching colleagues – masks the fact that those who teach Japanese in French schools are not a homogeneous group and have a range of statuses that shape the concrete reality of Japanese language education in schools.

The differences between tenured teachers (*professeurs agrégés* and *professeurs certifiés*) and non-tenured teachers are as follows.

Tenured teachers have successfully passed competitive examinations (known as *concours*) that validate and guarantee their proficiency in the Japanese language. To some extent the exams they pass also indicate, if not practical experience, at least a certain amount of reflection on the teaching profession and offer those holding the qualification the possibility of training. Tenured teachers enjoy job security, a relatively good salary and institutional recognition. They are legitimate both in terms of their Japanese language abilities and their teaching abilities.

Non-tenured teachers, on the other hand, do not compete for their job and are recruited locally where no tenured teachers are available. In administrative terms, they are recruited on the basis of their degree. They have little job security, are poorly paid and have no institutional recognition except that accorded by pupils and parents. Non-tenured teachers from Japan are of course fluent in Japanese, but this is not necessarily the case for all French non-tenured teachers. What all of them share is a lack of teacher training prior to joining the profession, having generally come to it by accident or by default.

In consequence, the vast majority (up to 80%) of teachers had no experience when they began. The Japanese native speakers were recruited purely because the school had no tenured teachers available and because these individuals happened to be in France for their own personal reasons but were not originally involved in language teaching. Most of them hold degrees obtained in Japan but few have a diploma in education science or a teaching certificate.

The situation is different for French non-tenured teachers. Although most of these individuals have a diploma, it is often only a BA or at best an MA in Japanese, if not a degree from another discipline entirely. Yet holding a BA in Japanese is clearly insufficient to master this language and be able to teach it.

Without divulging the personal stories behind each of these cases (but which must be managed by the institution), I can say with no disrespect that for most of these individuals their personal background did not destine them to teach Japanese and that for many, this work is seen as a last resort, sometimes even a failure in terms of their original dreams and ambitions. The result is that more than a few could be described as fragile, lacking in confidence and feeling illegitimate for the job.

There are many practical consequences to this reality. For example, of the 68 non-tenured instructors teaching Japanese at secondary schools, the institution (and I) knows only half. Non-tenured teachers have no professional obligations outside their teaching hours and pupil evaluations, which is understandable, since this is all they are paid for, and badly at that. They are never inspected or assessed, except at the express request of the school principal or head teacher, which only happens when a serious problem has arisen.

Some non-tenured teachers feel so illegitimate or fragile in their teaching activity that they purposely avoid the rare opportunities offered for training and assistance. The teaching workshops organised in Paris each year by the Japan Foundation, for example, are attended by only half of teachers at most, and always the same ones.

Some do not even attempt to achieve tenure, a process available to them after five or six years in a non-tenured position under a law designed to reduce precarious employment in the public sector. The reason is that this process involves a language examination (in French and Japanese) and an evaluation of their teaching skills, something which, rightly or wrongly, they are convinced they will not succeed.

Of course, this is not the case for all non-tenured teachers and most of them carry out their work well – or do their best – and it is not my place to stigmatise or criticise. I simply wish to describe the reality on the ground. My comments may appear unjust; they are certainly taboo. In any case, they are only very rarely considered in research on Japanese didactics, where studies may sometimes consider the heterogeneity of the learners but almost never question the abilities and training of the teachers. In fact, it is always taken for granted that the teacher has the ability to teach well. Yet teaching is a profession, and while it may be a vocation, it is nonetheless a job that must be learned and for which training is required. Despite this, most teachers of Japanese at French secondary schools have never had professional training. This is a real problem and one for which teachers themselves are not responsible. They are not responsible for anything and cannot be held responsible for anything. Responsibility lies with the institution. This must be taken into account when considering the state of Japanese language education at French secondary schools. It must also be taken into account by researchers.

Sometimes what I call 'miracles' occur: French or Japanese individuals who are excellent teachers despite having no prior experience and either no special interest in teaching previously or a level of Japanese that appears relatively weak. Yet while Joseph Jacotot –and Jacques Rancière (1999)– has demonstrated that anyone can teach, even things they do not know, in practice, such cases are exceptions and not the general rule. In reality, being Joseph Jacotot requires many years' experience, strong convictions and a healthy ability to reflect on oneself and one's practice.

Although the majority of studies on Japanese language teaching address the subject of language difficulties, learner diversity and teaching problems, none of them really questions the capacity of teachers to teach. Yet this is a very real problem for Japanese education at French secondary schools, as this sector is not sufficiently professionalised.

I am well aware that my comments make for uncomfortable listening and are something of a taboo in French schools, no doubt in other countries too. In fact, nobody wants to see it, nobody wants to talk about it, nobody wants to take it into account, because it reflects badly on all those involved: on the institution that entrusts teaching to unqualified individuals in return for a financial saving; on the teachers who do not want to weaken their position and need their salary so remain silent and avoid asking for help; and on the schools who do not want to admit to parents and pupils that their teachers might not be as competent as the title of professor suggests. Everyone in this situation is 'shameful' and prefers to look elsewhere.

This is what I wanted to say in this first part. It is not pleasant; it may appear stigmatising or unfair, but if we really want to talk about the state of Japanese teaching on the ground, it is difficult to avoid beginning with such an observation.

This is why I stated in my introduction that when there are problems with Japanese language education in French secondary schools today, these problems are often linked to professional teaching practices rather than to the teaching of the Japanese language itself.

3   Being a teacher means reflecting on one's own practice

Each November for the past seven years, the Japan Foundation has organised a one- or two-day teaching workshop in Paris for any secondary school teachers of Japanese wishing to participate. As part of the workshop participants are required to answer questions about the problems they encounter and indicate the issues they would like to see addressed.

Aside from one-off questions linked to changes in the curriculum or *baccalauréat* assessment procedures, a certain number of teaching-related problems have been consistently evoked over the past 6 years. They can be classified into two groups:

– class size (too few or too many students);
– mixed ability of learners;
– lack of motivation, concentration and/or effort among students.

– lack of 'real' Japanese textbooks or 'effective textbooks';
– lack of 'teaching guides' for teachers;
– lack of civilization texts dealing with the 4 (cultural) concepts presented at the *baccalauréat*.

These are the most frequently mentioned concerns and they are extremely interesting for our purposes today, particularly in the way they are expressed. Complaints falling into the second group, for example, are often formulated in the following way: 'Since there are no teaching guides for teachers, it is difficult to teach Japanese'; 'in other languages they have more intelligent textbooks'; or 'what textbook can we use effectively without pushing the students too much?'.

Why are they so interesting? Simply because these remarks and the way they are formulated illustrate the difficulty these teachers have in reflecting on their teaching practice and deciding where to anchor it.

For example, remarks in the first group can hardly be regarded as 'difficulties' and seem to me to be an inherent characteristic of education everywhere: homogeneous classes where all pupils have the same starting level, the same (strong) motivation, apply themselves equally, and progress at the same speed do not exist. This heterogeneity of level, ability, motivation and performance is at the very heart of teaching and is an unavoidable fact. What these remarks actually point to is a failure of these teachers to take into account reality. They can complain, but they alone hold the key to the solution. Or to put it differently, the only

solutions that exist are those they find themselves, individually, to manage this reality as best they can.

The three problems relating to teaching materials and textbooks also suggest a difficulty in thinking and acting beyond the 'textbook' as 'guide'. In this regard, the fact that the majority of teachers making these remarks are Japanese is also extremely significant. In fact, all these remarks, which echo what I have heard expressed in classes, indicate that many of the problems teachers face – especially those in difficulty – often result from a tendency to anchor their practice in a rigid model that has specific effects and consequences. What is more, these teachers are unaware that several anchoring points could be chosen, that these are not equivalent, and that the choice is theirs.

In fact, when a person who has never taught before or has never really thought about it suddenly finds themselves before a class, they generally teach as they themselves were taught or based on their ideas of the teaching profession.

Thus, among French non-tenured teachers we see attitudes like:
1. This is how I learned 10 years ago at university, so this is how I teach at secondary school now (which is impossible);
2. I don't really understand such or such a point, so I don't teach it and tell students that they will learn it later.

And among Japanese non-tenured teachers we see attitudes like:
1. I am Japanese and therefore speak Japanese better than the French, so I can teach it better and do as I please (very rare but you do see it);
2. I teach as I was taught, apply Japanese methods to a non-Japanese context, and this practice is unquestionable (there is no possible alternative).

The consequences for both French and Japanese non-tenured teachers are:
3. I try to do my best: I adapt, tinker, panic and hide;
4. I don't want to be assessed;
5. I ask for help / I don't want help.

Let us be clear, I am not saying that all non-tenured teachers at French secondary schools are unable to teach because they are unqualified. I am merely saying that this situation arises because no one shows them the real nature of teaching. Those who *really* think about their pedagogical practice are able to teach as well (or as badly) as other teachers. Conversely, those who do not reflect on their pedagogical practice unconsciously reproduce some of the major characteristics of the teaching they experienced in Japan or at university in France. However, while the methods used by Japanese teachers may be coherent in the context of the Japanese system, in practice they are inapplicable the French system, since they were not developed for this framework.

To return to my central point: educators must develop a considered and well thought out teaching method before they apply it. The question is, according to what? This brings us back to the question I posed in my title: Where should we anchor Japanese language education? Yet this question poses another more basic one: what is the educational act?

To answer this question, the pedagogical triangle, developed more than 35 years ago by the French educator and university professor Jean Houssaye to understand the educational process, seems to me to be an extremely effective and relevant tool. I'm sure that most of you are familiar with this model since it has been adapted into English and other languages (though very rarely in Japanese; see for example Yoshida 2014). Before I remind you, however, I want to emphasise one point: it is neither a method nor an educational movement

and offers no solutions. Nevertheless, it provides a model of the educational act and for this reason I often suggest it to teachers encountering difficulties. It is a tool that allows the user to proactively reflect on what they want to achieve and develop the ability to question their current methods and practice.

Houssaye's pedagogical triangle (Houssaye 2015) provides no answer because there is no answer. Instead, it helps us ask the right questions. It should be seen as a tool for anyone currently teaching or wanting to teach, guiding them to ask the right questions and reflect on their practice.

I will briefly present the model here, covering only what is relevant to my subject today. Jean Houssaye, professor emeritus of didactics and educational sciences at the University of Rouen, defined any educational activity as an interaction between the three points of a triangle representing the teacher, the learner and knowledge.
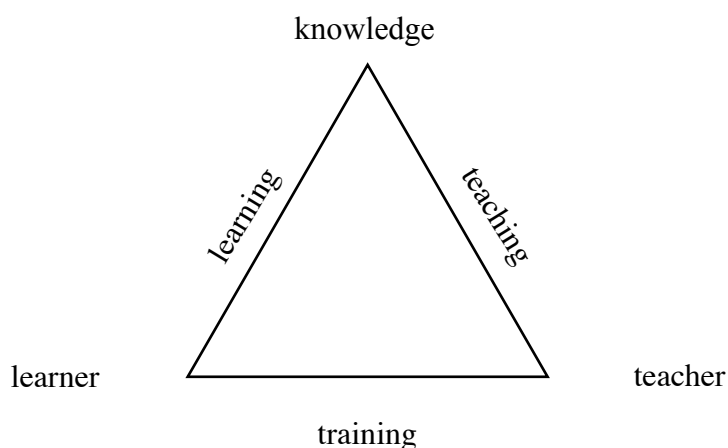

Figure 1 – Jean Houssaye's pedagogical triangle

This diagram models the actors and fundamental processes involved in any educational act. In particular, it illustrates the relationships that are established between the actors and the processes that take place:
  – Teaching process: between teacher and knowledge;
  – Training process: between teacher and learners;
  – Learning process: between learners and knowledge.

Many different versions of this triangle exist, some of them are considerably more complex and elaborate. However, people who usually refer to the French version often confine themselves to this model and forget that it is designed to represent the seven principles developed by Houssaye to explain all educational situations, and which are just as essential as the model itself. Below is my translation of the seven principles:

1. The educational situation can be defined as a triangle composed of three elements – knowledge, teacher and learners – two of which establish themselves as subjects, while the third must accept the role of the dead man or, failing that, begin to act the fool.

2. Every teaching method is structured around the special relationship linking two of the three elements to the exclusion of the third, with whom each selected element must nevertheless maintain contact; changing the teaching method means changing the basic relationship, or process.

3. Three processes exist: the teaching process, which emphasises teacher-knowledge interaction; the training process, which emphasises teacher-learner interaction; and the learning process, which emphasises learner-knowledge interaction. Given that the three types of interaction cannot be held as equal, one must be chosen and the other two redefined accordingly.

4. Once a process is established it is impossible to leave it from the inside; one remains dependent on its logic. Change can only take place by adopting another process. The three processes are mutually exclusive in their logic and not complementary.

5. The pedagogical triangle lies within a circle representing the institution, but the relationship with this encompassing body differs according to the process: for the 'teaching process' this relationship is one of equivalence [which Houssaye literally calls a 'relationship of identity'], for the 'training process' it is one of opposition, and for the 'learning process' it is one of tolerance.

6. A process will remain stable if the type of interaction it implies establishes its superiority but compensates and leaves enough space for the other two, otherwise it will not work satisfactorily: the dead man will begin to act the fool.

7. Any process is far from unequivocal. It allows for different teaching methods according to the importance accorded to each of the other two interaction types. Nonetheless, families of educational methods are shaped by their underlying structure and as such exclude one another. (Houssaye 2015 : 11-19)

The main point I want to underline today is that these three relationships cannot function concurrently: two points of the triangle are always emphasised to the detriment of the third, which, according to Houssaye, takes the place of the dead man (when neglected) or the fool (when it becomes disruptive).

Thus, for example:

– When teacher-knowledge interaction is emphasised lessons focus on knowledge, curriculums and discipline (this model involves traditional teaching methods, lectures, and textbooks/curriculums). In this situation, learners are the neglected element and either adopt the role of the dead man, becoming silent, passive, sleeping or not working (frustrated personal dynamics), or adopt the role of the fool to become defiant and disruptive.

– When teacher-learner interaction is emphasised lessons focus on the learners (teaching techniques and model adopted involve active, non-directive teaching, advising students, rules established as the course progresses, a psychological approach). Knowledge is the neglected element and when occupying the place of the dead, may allow or encourage teachers to deviate from the curriculum, collective reference texts and the institution; in short, there is a 'lack' of content and this can become a source of frustration for teachers and discomfort for learners, who may once again play 'dead'. Students like their teachers but feel they do not learn anything and may have difficulty situating themselves in relation to the curriculum.

– When learner-knowledge interaction is emphasised learners build knowledge (learning strategies and model adopt feature a constructivist pedagogy, tutoring). The neglected element here is the teacher, who becomes a mere organiser or facilitator. The teacher either occupies the place of the dead and feels useless or adopts the role of the fool and becomes over-invested in 'coaching' pupils, chooses overly difficult teaching materials, and so on. In fact, in this scenario the teacher may pollute the learning process.

The educational act, or teaching profession if you prefer, consists in regulating these processes, in choosing when and which one to use, in being aware of the mechanisms

involved and the effects produced, including unwanted and negative ones, in adapting the selected process to actual conditions, and in changing the process when it loses its effectiveness and goes off the rails. What is primordial here is not the type of interaction chosen but rather the space occupied by the teacher, in relation to which he or she must be able to define their position. None of the processes is inherently good or bad. It is a space for negotiation, and an unusual negotiation at that, since it takes place between the teacher and him or herself.

Just one more word on the pedagogical triangle: naturally, it can be made more complex by including new variables and this has been done by certain individuals, including Houssaye himself, in some cases even changing the triangle to a didactical tetrahedron. The triangle can be made more complex because in reality each point is constrained by a variety of elements that are external, personal, psychological, institutional or private in nature. In our case, for example, the fact that the majority of teachers are Japanese and therefore constrained by a particular conception of teaching and educational methods, is significant. However, making this triangle more complex reduces its effectiveness as a tool for reflection. My objective here is not to propose a definitive theoretical tool or to present Houssaye's triangle as such. Nor is it to discuss the triangle theoretically and attempt to understand the pedagogical act in a heuristic, definitive way. I merely reiterate my belief that a reflexive tool should be simple. To my mind, the original version of the triangle is sufficient, and the only level of complexity required corresponds to the fifth of Houssaye's seven principles:

> 5. The pedagogical triangle lies within a circle representing the institution, but the relationship with this encompassing body differs according to the process adopted: it is a relationship based on equivalence for the 'teaching process', opposition for the 'training process', and tolerance for the 'learning process'. (Houssaye 2015 : 15)

This is an extremely important point and undoubtedly represents the main difference between the educational practice of secondary school teachers and that of university lectures (which is what most of you here today are). I will discuss this point more fully later.

At this point, I would like to compare the theoretical model represented by Houssaye's triangle with the demands and problems voiced by the teachers I have observed. As you will remember, the issues these educators evoke include: class size, learner heterogeneity, lack of motivation, concentration and/or effort from students; a lack of 'real' Japanese textbooks or 'effective textbooks', and a lack of 'teachers' guides' for instructors, a lack of civilization texts dealing with concepts presented at the *baccalauréat*.

In fact, the first set of problems is characteristic of teachers who have chosen to emphasise teacher-knowledge interaction in their classroom practice and are confronted with students who play dead or act the fool. As for the second set, it too suggests an emphasis on teacher-knowledge interaction, since the teachers' requests clearly illustrate a tendency to see their role as merely a 'teacher who teaches'.

Accordingly, this triangle also helps us improve our understanding of textbooks – their function, purpose and use. In fact, textbooks are the main and preferred tool of an educational style focused on the teacher-knowledge axis because of its relationship to the institution. Allow me once again to quote Houssaye, who stresses that a 'relationship of equivalence [or 'identity'] exists between the school institution and the teaching process':

> If one considers the school institution, a curious phenomenon can be seen: there is an assimilation between an institutional form (the school) and an educational configuration (the 'teaching process'). It is considered normal, natural, and almost mandatory, to 'teach' at school. If you begin to adopt other practices, you may well seem out of place. However, we have not always 'taught' at

school. Many other forms of pedagogy exist, and it remains quite possible to do otherwise at school. (Houssaye 2015 : 15)

The subject of school materials is central in education, particularly in the case of Japanese instruction, where teachers are predominantly of Japanese origin and whose professional practice assigns a different function to such materials. Without going into too much detail here – because this subject is much more complex than it appears – allow me to recall some basic points concerning textbooks.

In Japan, the textbook:
– Is the main teaching tool;
– Is compulsory in elementary, middle and secondary schools;
– Guides and constrains the instructor's teaching style;
– Exactly follows the curriculum, with which it forms a coherent whole;
– Must be taught in its entirety;
– Limits the pedagogical freedom of teachers to presenting the method proposed in the textbook;
– Allows no freedom but is comforting as it leaves no room for no doubts or questioning.

In France, the textbook:
– Is one tool among others;
– Is not compulsory;
– Is intended to facilitate the work of the teacher;
– In principle, is consistent with the curriculum but may also feature other elements or not all the elements in the curriculum; it may also include different pedagogical options or a particular philosophy of teaching;
– Can be used (or not) as the teacher sees fit;
– Does not solve any of the questions the teacher may have. Its use depends on the decisions made by the teacher with regards his or her profession.

Given this, it is clear that when French teachers and Japanese teachers ask for textbooks, they are not asking for the same thing. What is more, requests for textbooks emanating from French teachers is inversely proportionate to the teacher's level of experience: the less experience they have, the more likely they are to ask for a textbook and deplore its absence. Conversely, the more experience they have, the less they deplore its absence because they know that no textbook will ever correspond perfectly to their methods and needs. They are aware that they will only use such a text partially or not at all, since none will be suited to their own pupils. They therefore prefer to create their own teaching materials.

In this sense, as an inspector representing the institution and trying to improve Japanese education in France, there are only two reasons for ever wishing to have real French textbooks for the teaching of Japanese:
– To institutionalise Japanese education vis-à-vis other school subjects: textbooks are a pledge, a mark of importance and of institutional legitimacy;
– To help inexperienced teachers and offer them an initial framework which they will naturally abandon when they have acquired more experience.

Personally, as a teacher and a teacher of the Japanese language, I do not need a textbook and have no wish for one.

My purpose here is not to debate the best teaching method and characteristics of a good textbook. Nor is it to compare the Japanese and French education systems or defend a

particular educational method. I am not arguing for or against the use of textbooks or suggesting that teachers should choose one of the triangle's processes over another. Naturally, I have my own opinion on these subjects, but it would not be appropriate to present them here. My point is that teachers providing Japanese education in French secondary schools must be aware of these challenges and the realities they face. They must make their choices within the framework of the national curriculum and according to the actual situation and abilities of the pupils they teach. This is their responsibility alone and it is only by making such choices that they can carry out their work. Nevertheless, they are not limited to choosing one specific style from the triangle and can adjust them to the reality (potential, attitude, level of skill) of their audience, which they alone can assess. They must analyse their own teaching practices and be clearly aware of their consequences. Any method can work if it is suited to the audience and it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that this is the case.

In short, before becoming a teacher of Japanese they must first become a teacher. By this I mean that they must first analyse their practice with regards the different teaching processes and not from the point of view of the Japanese language.

4   What can be done to help Japanese language teachers to teach (better)?

My comments thus far, which relate to different teaching configurations, also have consequences for didactic research and hence for research into Japanese didactics. Here too, however, reality in the field leads me to make observations that will appear a little severe:
- only a fraction of Japanese academic research in Japanese didactics reaches teachers in the field in one form or another;
- virtually none of the studies in Japanese didactics is of any use to teachers in the field, or at least is regarded as such by them, which is the same thing.

Research activity (which is what you and I do) and practice in the field appear to be two completely separate worlds.

On this point, I must repeat that my comments here only apply to teaching in secondary schools and not to university teaching or for adults. That is to say, they concern a context where teaching is framed and constrained by an institution and a curriculum.

4.1   Resources rather than textbooks (or methods)

The situation can be easily summed up with an anecdote. A groupe of teachers who has spent several hours listening to Japanese education specialists trying to introduce them to various innovative and effective teaching practices comments that: 'What you are presenting is very interesting, but we cannot use it in the classroom because we are already overwhelmed by the demands of the curriculum'. Admittedly, this could be perceived as yet another sign of teachers' lack of reflection on their role and profession. However, things are not quite so simple. If any fault lies with teachers, it is shared by the specialists who propose these educational activities, which generally present two disadvantages:
- no matter what might be said, these activities do not take into account the reality of teaching (by which I mean teachers' abilities, their administrative status, material and practical conditions, and the constraints they face);
- researchers also struggle to reflect on their work and its adaptability to real teaching situations. In fact, to borrow the words of Pierre Bourdieu, we can ask the following harsh question: are these studies designed to help teachers in the field or are they really intended to help their authors consolidate their position in the academic world of Japanese didactics as a social field?

Concerning the first point, researchers generally forget that 'education is a social reality', as Houssaye and others have pointed out, but also that it is a 'human reality and activity'. And

even when this is remembered in theory, the objects and methods produced pay little heed to it. As a social reality, schools exist within institutions and these institutions differ greatly from one country to another, and even within the same country. As a human activity, they are based on human beings. Institutions impose constraints (material, financial or curriculum-related), while the fact that schools are a human activity means that teaching is dependent on the individual abilities of teachers (intellectual, pragmatic, reflexive, pedagogical, and level of training). I will not go into detail here but simply provide some general examples.

In view of everything I have said, research that is openly and consciously focused on the teacher-knowledge axis cannot avoid taking into account the institutional framework, which differs by country. In consequence, studies developed for the United States cannot be applied to France and vice versa. The same is true of teaching materials.

Similarly, an approach that is openly and consciously focused on learner-knowledge interaction is almost certain to be unsuitable or inappropriate in the context of national public schools constrained by curriculums that induce 'teaching process' methods.

Concerning the second point that teaching is a 'social reality or a human activity', I think the problem is even more serious, since most studies, despite occasionally taking into account learner heterogeneity, very rarely account for teacher heterogeneity. While they do sometimes consider that not all pupils are ideal pupils, most of the studies and pedagogical situations they propose implicitly suppose an idealness on behalf of teachers at the psychological, intellectual, pedagogical, administrative, financial and institutional levels.

The problem with research in Japanese didactics is that the results and tools they produce take little account of the context and nature of teaching as a 'social reality' and 'human activity'. Consequently, these tools can never be used in full and partially using them reduces their coherence and effectiveness, leading teachers in the field to overlook or reject them.

This failure to take into account reality also has a bearing on the last two points I wish to discuss today, namely, the production of textbooks (or, more generally, teaching materials) and the contribution of new technology.

4.2   Education is a social reality

Let us take the example of textbooks, or teaching materials more generally. Allow me to begin by reiterating that the very concept of textbooks differs from one country to another. In France, textbooks, with the exception of primary school readers, rarely propose a method and generally consist of a collection of documents that support the curriculum. Devising or choosing a method is the responsibility of the teacher. A history textbook, for example, will offer texts and other documents on a particular event but does not impose a specific use on the teacher. This might take the form of a lecture or a workshop. The teacher is also free to choose which points to teach, emphasise or avoid. Additionally, no one expects the lessons in the textbook to be presented in their entirety, and in order, from the first page to the last. The same is true of foreign language textbooks.

Take the example of the *Marugoto* textbooks and resources developed by the Japan Foundation after considerable, remarkable and coherent research. As far as I have seen, *Marugoto* is little used in French classrooms, if at all. And when it is, teachers are not really satisfied with it and only use it 'for want of a better one'. Why is this? Simply because *Marugoto* is a self-contained method and is completely disconnected from the social and human reality of classroom teaching due to its universal and transnational vocation. As well as being clearly focused on the teaching-knowledge axis, *Marugoto* takes no account of the institutional context and 'reality' in which it is supposed to be used.

In France, for example, the Ministry of Education made the decision several years ago to introduce children to foreign languages via culture (in addition to an action-oriented and communication-oriented approach). The Ministry of Education describes its objectives in the

following terms (quoted from the ministry's official website; emphasis and translation my own):

> Anchoring Learning in Culture
> *To be effective, instruction in living languages must combine both language and culture, two dimensions that are so intimately linked that to consider them separately is to deny the true nature of language.* Whether this language is spoken in countries more or less distant from each other does not prevent the existence of shared representations or of variations that merely reinforce the anchorage in a given reality.
>
> Foreign language culture, in all its forms, can be found in the media, on the internet and in the family environment. *Beginning in cycle 2 and under the teacher's guidance, pupils build references in the context of the target language and gradually develop a distanced view of representations of the culture of the countries whose language they are learning.* At an early age, pupils may listen to and learn a poem or nursery rhyme, observe a painting or photo, and create statements or stories 'in the manner of'. Language teachers will find students curious to discover other civilisations.
>
> At primary school and middle school, *culture, in all its forms, is presented via a communicative approach that goes beyond everyday situations (which are not always very attractive to pupils)* to include the notion of point of view, representation and world view. In this respect, the learning of modern languages is instrumental in training critical minds and future citizens able to face today's complex world. (Eduscol 2017)

At middle school (*collège*), for example, where *Marugoto* is supposed to be used, the objectives are supplemented in the following way (quoted from the ministry's official website; emphasis and translation my own):

> CYCLE 4
> In each language studied and in the convergence between them, *the major aims of the cycle are cultural discovery and intercultural relations*, in close conjunction with language activities.

> CYCLE 4
> • To perceive the cultural specificities of the countries and regions of the language *studied by going beyond a fixed and schematic view of stereotypes and clichés*.
> • Use cultural references to interpret a message, text, or sound recording.
> • Draw on learners' cultural knowledge to describe real or imaginary characters, to tell. (Eduscol 2016)

Four cultural entries were chosen for middle school: languages; school and society; travel and migration; encounters with other cultures. For secondary school (*lycée*), in connection with the general theme of 'the art of living together' common to all foreign and regional modern languages being taught, the following three notions were selected: memory, sense of belonging, and visions of the future. For students in their *baccalauréat* year, the general entry 'Founding gestures and moving worlds' is divided into 4 sections: myths and heroes; spaces and exchanges; places and forms of power; the idea of progress.

In order to fully understand the ministry's position and what is imposed on foreign languages teachers, here is another quote from the official website, which presents some online resources (quoted from the ministry's official website; emphasis and translation my own):

> **General presentation of living language resources (foreign and regional)**
> Foreign and regional language curriculums '*do not provide details of classroom practices and teachers' approaches. They let teachers judge how best to achieve the curriculum's objectives*

based on the actual situations they encounter in the daily exercise of their profession', as stated in the curriculum's foreword to Cycle 4.

The resources proposed here are intended *to help teachers reflect* on how to prepare and implement modern language classes. They aim *to provide ideas that can be adapted and changed according to student profiles and the specifics of each class and school. They are intended to support the educational initiative of teachers and not to impose a model.* They are based on the new primary and middle school curricula, which in turn are linked to the common base of knowledge, skills and culture. (Eduscol 2017)

In fact, in France, the textbook as a tool is not particularly relevant. What is more useful to teachers, who are supposed (and encouraged) to construct their own educational tools, is the concept of resources from which they can choose what they need in order to create lessons according to their teaching method, audience and curriculum.

This method renders *Marugoto* unusable because the French approach to learning languages via culture has not been taken into account. Looking at teachers out in the field, we can see that *Marugoto* is used either very little or incompletely, and therefore misused. It gives some confidence to novice teachers who have a tool to cling to, but it does not simplify their lives because it needs to be supplemented and adapted to the curriculum. And since this textbook is not really adaptable, it requires too much work from teachers and is eventually abandoned. The same applies to all the textbooks available in France today, since none is specifically designed for secondary education and based on the French curriculum.

One more word. As a textbook designed to be used in any country, *Marugoto* is necessarily based entirely on the language it teaches (Japanese) and progresses from simple to complex material. However, a method that moves from simple to complex rarely works with pupils because 'simple' and 'complex' refers to the object studied and not to learners' abilities. What works is a method that progresses not from simple to complex but from easy to difficult. Yet what is easy for one student is not necessarily easy for another; and what is easy for students in one country is not necessarily easy for students in another. This is particularly true in foreign language teaching because pupils' understanding of the new language is linked to the linguistic awareness they have developed for their mother tongue, a linguistic awareness that is not the same for pupils whose mother tongue is English, German, Chinese, Korean or French.

Moreover, by choosing to focus on the 'average' learner of an 'average' age, *Marugoto* may appear too difficult or too easy depending on the audience. Allow me to quote a teacher who was asked about *Marugoto* and whose opinion is shared by a large number of French teachers:

We tried *Marugoto* as part of the pilot class, but we were not convinced. The students, especially the most gifted, did not find it interesting. This textbook is far too easy compared to the requirements of the *baccalauréat* and the lessons progress too slowly.

In the classes I have observed, the best or most effective teachers use no textbook or only intermittently. Instead they make their own teaching materials from many existing resources. In this sense, the pupils' 'exercise book', which is gradually formed lesson after lesson, takes the place of textbooks and is much more effective. In doing so, teachers may use textbooks but as resources not as a method, and they are always in search of different resources, especially online. As an inspector, I can judge the quality of the teacher I am assessing just by looking at these exercise books.

4.3 ICT: a revolution of possibilities rather than a pedagogical revolution

My remarks can also be applied to Information and Communications Technology tools. Indeed, seen from the field, it is very simple (and probably hopeless in the eyes of new-technology advocates): I have never seen a single teacher implement a teaching method based on new technologies that would have been different (albeit less efficient) without these new technologies. To put it differently, I have seen teachers use digital tools (computers, video-projectors, laptops, blogs, online counselling) to make their teaching practice more dynamic and effective, but I have never seen new practices being introduced by these tools.

This is for good reason, because I think that new technologies do not represent a pedagogical revolution in that they have never brought about the emergence of new proposals or pedagogical constructions that are as completely original and innovative as those of Montessori, Freinet, Pestalozzi or Comenius.

What they have done is allow the principles of these famous educators to be implemented on a larger scale and increased their effectiveness, made it possible to individualise learning paces, to de-territorialise teaching and learning venues, to multiply and personalise exercises, to reinforce learning by multiplying exercises, and to de-institutionalise learning. They have allowed everything that is known to work best, since individualised teaching (which has existed since the dawn of time) has been combined with a constructivist and action-oriented approach that places more importance on learning than on teaching. Even the possibility of *flipped classrooms* (known as *pédagogie inversée* (or reversed pedagogy) in French), which for me is probably the most seductive contribution of new technologies, is not a novelty in terms of its theoretical principles but could indeed constitute a revolution if it is adopted in official institutions (like French public schools). The reason for this is that while students and parents will be surprised at first but will eventually adapt, teachers and institutions will probably have more trouble doing so: teachers because their skills will surely be challenged and redefined; schools because the flipped classroom favours a learner-knowledge focus, and as we have seen, this is not the one naturally favoured by the school as an institution.

In any case, what I would like to stress is that ICT provides no other pedagogical revolution than a revolution of possibilities in the field of teaching methods. Currently, the main problems with these new technologies – and on this point, there are indisputably major differences between universities and secondary schools, between public and private institutions, and between countries – are shortages in facilities or basic teaching and learning of ICT materials in schools, a lack or low level of teacher training, and a lack of motivation from teachers who often see these methods as cosmetic, which is frequently the case.

In fact, the same criticisms can be made of ICT 'products' as of textbooks: the tools proposed are not adapted to the curriculum, to school equipment, and to 'what teachers can really do'. The consequences are also the same as for textbooks: good teachers, meaning 'high performing' teachers, use open resources such as *Minna kyōzai* (http://minnanokyozai.jp), *Erin* (http://erin.ne.jp) or YouTube, but not as a ready-made method or tools. They do not need ready-made houses but rather bricks to build their own houses. Instead of definitive, general, ready-made and complete tools, methods or systems, technology developers should design tools from which teachers can create their own tools, adaptable to their own institution, learners and local reality, something that is impossible for the designer but not for the teacher. Teachers alone have the ultimate responsibility. Let us help them shoulder that responsibility as best they can.

5   Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to return to the question I posed in my title: Students, teachers, language, educational method and new media? Where should we anchor Japanese language

education? My answer, based on the arguments and observations I have presented today, would be something along the lines of: I don't know, or It depends. There is no (general) answer because many answers exist and only teachers know which is the right one.

All teaching methods work but not for all students and not in all situations. Accordingly, teachers must decide which process – or which point of the triangle – is best adapted to their situation. Any of the three could be suitable but a choice must be made. To do so, teachers must bear in mind the national curriculum, their actual situation and the ability of the students they teach. They do not have to choose one of the processes definitively but can experiment according to the reality (potential, attitude, level) of their learners and the objectives they want to achieve. All methods work if they match the audience and it is the teacher's job to ensure this is the case. Teaching is a profession that requires training and education is a social reality that must not be cut off from the outside world. Being a teacher means being constantly aware of these facts and permanently reflecting on one's own practice.

Secondly, what can be done to help teachers teach? Once again, when seen from the field, the answers are simple.

At the teachers' level (which, for tenure-track teachers, is the responsibility of the institutions): to train them not as teachers of Japanese but as teachers; to help them develop a reflexive attitude on their practice and be able to situate their methods (pedagogical triangle); to encourage and help them devise their own teaching method (by evaluating, choosing, adapting).

At the research level: to clearly identify the targeted pedagogy and/or subject studied; to have a clear understanding of the educational situation; to take into account the social and human reality (the institution and the men and women behind the institution).

At the material-creation level (textbook or ICT tools): to clearly identify the targeted pedagogy and/or subject studied (what pedagogical situation is required and for what context?); to take into account the social reality (institution: curriculum); to take into account the human reality (teachers' actual skills and teaching autonomy/freedom); to develop smaller tools and methods rather than global ones; to develop resources rather than textbooks; to develop tools to build tools – which help teachers devise their own method – rather than definitive tools and methods.

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