

1 OVERVIEW

Project leader(s) contact:

Toru OONO (Mr.; Director)

Noriko SATO (Ms.; Chief Officer)

Country: Japan

Institution: The Japan Foundation

Type of context: Worldwide

Educational sector: General

Main focus: Creating a CEFR-based coursebook series

SUMMARY

Name: Textbooks for a national language

Abstract:

This practice is related to a series of coursebooks entitled *Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture* (The Japan Foundation [JF] 2013a, 2013b) which is been developing based on the CEFR. The *Marugoto* series is been developing based on 'JF Standard for Japanese Language Education' (JFS), a framework for Japanese language learning based on the CEFR).

The JFS itself does not by itself prescribe any teaching methodology: the coursebooks are a plan of teaching that provide users with ways to apply the framework. While the CEFR-informed, action-oriented coursebooks challenge the traditional style of form-focused Japanese language teaching, the coursebooks are designed to be easily applicable by both teachers and students. The levels of the *Marugoto* series have been published from A1 levels in 2013, adding coursebooks for following levels every two years.

Stage: Planning

Theme: Materials development

CEFR aspects used: Levels, descriptors, self-assessment, language portfolio

Main features of this example:

- Can do descriptors
- Portfolio based on ELP
- Self-assessment and reflection

Quality principles particularly demonstrated: Transparency, Coherence



2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background:

The Japan Foundation is a non-profit public organisation funded by the Japanese government and is engaged in international cultural exchange, including supporting Japanese language education overseas. They have developed the *Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture* series based on 'JF Standard for Japanese Language Education' (JFS), a framework for Japanese language learning based on the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001). *Marugoto* series textbooks have been published at three levels (A1, A2 and B1) so far.

Stated aims:

Provide a CEFR-based textbook for successive levels, based on the JFS.

Steps/stages:

1. *The 'JF Standard for Japanese Language Education' (JFS)*

The JFS, released in 2010, has six levels of proficiency, similar to those of the CEFR, with each level being described in the form of 'Can Do' descriptors (CEFR 2001). The descriptors are available in the database called the *Minna no "Can-do" Website*, where users can log in, search for descriptors by category and level, and save selected and/or edited 'Can Do' descriptors in an individual user's own folder (jfstandard.jp/cando/top/ja/render.do). The website includes English language versions of the descriptors in addition to Japanese versions so that the descriptors can be shared with learners and stakeholders. The JFS also focuses on competence in intercultural understanding, and proposes a portfolio to support learners' self-management of their own learning and assessment.

2. *Marugoto organisation; dual approach*

The JFS defines proficiency in terms of actual performance rather than in terms of language knowledge. In order to realise this principle, *Marugoto* at A1 and A2 level clearly divides performance practice and conventional learning of language forms. Each level consists of two volumes, which offer two different types of learning:

- *Katsudoo* (communicative language activities), and
- *Rikai* (communicative language competences).

In *Katsudoo*, the objectives of each lesson are described on the first page in the form of simply phrased 'Can Do' descriptors (e.g. 'Say what your favorite dish is', 'Talk with a friend about where to go for lunch', 'Read a menu', 'Order food and drinks at a hamburger shop'). These descriptors are rephrased with elaborate descriptions (e.g. 'Can ask a friend questions about what food he/she likes and answer questions about what food one likes, while having a meal together: A1 level) so that the level of performance would conform to a CEFR level, and are included in the database called *Minna no "Can-do" Website* where teachers/learners of *Marugoto* can share their learning objectives and achievements with those outside the institution who do not know *Marugoto*.

Rikai offers explicit learning about language forms which language teachers have traditionally been familiar with. The objectives of each lesson in *Rikai* are given in the form of grammatical patterns such as '*Sukina ryoori wa karee desu*' ('My favorite dish is curry') and so on. The answers to the exercises are offered in audio format, so that explicit learning of language forms is done with spoken language that involves accents and phonetic change.

Intercultural understanding is emphasized through 'Life and Culture' pages that encourage noticing differences and similarities among cultures. It is expected that learners reflect on their own culture through such discussions and notice variety among individuals even among the same culture.

3. *Portfolio approach*

A European Language Portfolio (ELP)-type approach is encouraged as learners are expected to create learning achievements like recorded speech samples and essays, and create assessment tables like a self-assessment checklist. The final page of the coursebook includes the self-assessment checklist where the learning objectives of all the lessons are listed. Every time they finish a lesson, they evaluate their own learning by colouring the stars and writing comments. This process encourages learners to reflect on what they have learned and to realise what more they would like to learn.

If teachers/learners look at the *Minna no "Can-do" Website*, they can see other 'Can Do' descriptors at the same level with the same topic, which are available for further learning. The website descriptors can be shared with learners and other stakeholders.

Publications that have been used or produced related to this example:

This text is based on:

Yokoyama, Noriko (2017). Marugoto: Japanese Language and Culture – the series of coursebooks based on the JF Standard for Japanese Language Education. In O'Dwyer, Fergus, Hunke, Morten, Imig, Alexander, Nagai, Noriko, Naganuma, Naoyuki & Schmidt, Maria Gabriela (Eds) *Critical, Constructive Assessment of CEFR-informed Language Teaching in Japan and Beyond* (The English Profile Studies series, volume 6), pp. 67-76. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Links:

JF Standard for Japanese Language Education: <http://jfstandard.jp/summary/ja/render.do>

The Minna no "Can-do" Website: <http://jfstandard.jp/cando/top/ja/render.do>

Marugoto series: <https://www.marugoto.org/en/>

3 ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNT:

Some steps for others who may engage in similar textbook-related activities:

- Make a list of 'Can Do' descriptors of the appropriate level, situated in the real world that the target users are most likely to encounter. The best selected 'Can Do' descriptors should be both the objectives of the lessons of the textbook as well as the index of assessment.
- Extract essential language forms from the above-mentioned 'Can Do' descriptors. The selection of language forms should follow the selection of 'Can Do' descriptors, NOT vice versa.
- Include learning of strategies in the textbook for learners to cope with the real-world 'Can Do' descriptors: both comprehension strategies such as inferencing and production strategies such as questioning and substitution are necessary.
- Make each lesson flow from abundant input to moderate output. The fact that the language level of comprehension is higher than that of production should be kept in mind when creating listening scripts and conversational dialogue.