

Concept-based Language Instruction

Usage-based Linguistics and Sociocultural
Theory in Teaching Japanese

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Chapter 1

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**Combining sociocultural theory and
usage-based linguistics to transform
language pedagogy**

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1 Concept-based language instruction

Combining sociocultural theory and usage-based linguistics to transform language pedagogy¹

Introduction

How can we teach Japanese in a way that focuses on meaning, form, and culture? The communicative approach to language teaching has been touted as an answer—teaching language for the purposes of communication. Anyone teaching Japanese, however, understands how daunting Japanese grammar is. And, so is Japanese pragmatics—how the language is used in context. Grammatical and pragmatic tools are needed in order to use Japanese for communication or for reading and writing. How, then, can we teach these? In terms of grammar, how can we help students to connect forms with meanings? Moving on to pragmatics, how do we help students to integrate forms, meanings, and contexts? In fact, though, splintering of grammar, form, meaning, and culture is a false understanding of language. Language is, from the start, a holistic system of human communication that *integrates* forms, meanings, and contexts. In this book, we present a *conceptual* approach to language instruction that takes us back to these integrated roots of language and culture. This approach is based in a sociocultural understanding of human development and learning. The name of this approach is concept-based language instruction (C-BLI), which has also been called concept-based instruction.² This chapter introduces C-BLI and the theories that form its foundation: usage-based linguistics and sociocultural theory.

What is Concept-Based Language Instruction (C-BLI)?

Japanese language teaching today is an eclectic endeavor. Most teachers would say that their approach is “communicative.” Current approaches to teaching Japanese combine this goal of communicating with proficiency-oriented and task-based approaches, and have a strong focus-on-form. There is general agreement among practitioners that grammar is important in teaching Japanese to those with a background in European languages. The major

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Japanese textbooks for beginners in North America—*Yōkoso* (Tohsaku, 2006), *Nakama* (Hatasa, Makino, and Hatasa, 2021), *Genki* (Banno, Ikeda, Ohno, Shinagawa, and Tokashiki, 2020a, 2020b), and *Tobira* (Oka, Kondo, Tsutsui, Mori, Okuno, Sakakibara, Sogabe, and Yasuda, 2021)—use grammatical syllabi with minor differences from textbook to textbook. These textbooks contextualize grammar and pragmatics in written dialogs to show them in context. Grammar and pragmatics are then explained as individual items, with prescriptive rules provided. Learning is about following these sequentially presented rules. However, grammar and pragmatics are not a collection of rules, but are part of a conceptual system, motivated by meaning. The rules provided in current textbooks do not offer a coherent understanding of how meaning and form are combined. In contrast, our usage-based approach values what cognitive linguists call form-meaning pairings, based on how language is actually used. Students need to understand the realms of meaning from which grammar and pragmatics emerge.

C-BLI is different from current practices, as it teaches grammar and pragmatics *conceptually*, with a focus on *meaning-making*. Grammar is not distinct from lexicon (the vocabulary of a language), pragmatics, and culture. These work together as part of an integrated system of meaning-making. Concepts underpin grammar and cultural behaviors, and teaching them with a focus on meaning empowers students to make choices about how to express themselves. C-BLI is an antidote to rule-based, mechanical approaches to teaching grammar and pragmatics that dominate current Japanese language instruction.

The concepts taught via C-BLI are discovered through analysis of Japanese language in use, that is, usage-based linguistics. The theory of instruction for C-BLI is sociocultural, an approach to understanding human mind and development as deeply historical, social, and psychological. This book is part of a growing movement of scholars and teaching experts who are bringing together usage-based understandings of language with sociocultural understandings of mind and human development (Achard, 2018; Holme, 2007; Lantolf, 2006; Lantolf and Poehner, 2014; Masuda, Arnett, and Labarca, 2015; Masuda, 2018, 2021b; Masuda and Ohta, 2021; Ohta and Masuda, 2018; Poehner and Lantolf, 2024; Tyler, 2012).

C-BLI is an integrative approach to language teaching. This means that C-BLI integrates grammar with culture and usage-based meanings. It is a strongly research-based approach; scholars working in the area of C-BLI uncover concepts by doing research on second language acquisition (SLA), analyzing language in use, testing concept-based materials by having students use them, and studying how student development unfolds. In this way, we integrate language teaching with research by using both usage-based linguistics and language acquisition research as resources for our materials development. Then, teaching is the place where materials are

tested, used, and revised. This process, in sociocultural theory, is called *praxis*, a merging of theory and practice (Pohener and Lantolf, 2024). Teaching and research are a combined endeavor in this approach. C-BLI is also a transformative approach to language teaching. This approach transforms students by working to create an L2 mind; rather than being rule-followers, students become decision-makers, empowered to make language choices based on target language concepts. In the following sections, we share the basics of usage-based linguistics and sociocultural theory. We end the chapter by considering praxis—the interactive processes of teaching and research that bind us as we, as scholars and teachers, work to improve Japanese language pedagogy and develop stronger understandings of Japanese L2 development.

What is usage-based linguistics and why is it useful for language teaching and SLA research?

Usage-based linguistics analyzes language as actually used in talk and texts. In this book, we use the term “usage-based linguistics” broadly to include cognitive, corpus, and discourse analytic approaches to language. *Cognitive linguistics* understands language as grounded in our embodied experience in the world. Grammar, thus, is a product of language use. Langacker (2000: 3) proposes the term “usage-based” model to emphasize the importance of language usage. He explains that grammar is a “schematization of overt occurring expressions” that “spring[s] from *the soil of actual usage*” (our emphasis). In other words, as human beings develop, we do not first learn general or abstract rules for language, but rather our cognition (hand-in-hand with language) develops while we use particular structures as units, from which we extract schematic structures. Innate human cognitive abilities like scanning for source-path-goal and categorization become encoded in language through the dynamics of our everyday bodily experiences. These experiences make it possible for schemata to develop and be entrenched (or strengthened). In other words, according to Langacker (and we agree), human primary (or first) language learning is a bottom-up process as language emerges from interconnections between embodied experiences, language use, communication, and thought. Bybee (2006: 711) states that grammar is the “cognitive organization of one’s experience with language.” In primary language acquisition, speakers discover frequently used patterns through their ordinary daily experience of analyzing large quantities of data (Tomasello, 2003). These data, called *corpora* (the plural of *corpus*), allow schemata to emerge and become established. Corpora serve as the foundation of every person’s ability to use language (Bybee, 2008). The same processes are at work in SLA (Ellis and Wulff, 2015). Ellis and Wulff (2015) discuss different types of

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frequency effects as having differently weighted impacts depending on the target structure and the L2 learner's developmental stage.

Following this understanding, *corpus linguists* use language corpora—whether transcripts of talk, written language, or both—to discover patterns in language. These patterns include words that occur together (collocations), patterns of phrases, and semantic networks used in spoken and written language. These would be hard to identify using small amounts of data (Sinclair, 1991). Meanwhile, *discourse analysts* analyze language-in-use. Discourse analysts typically work with less data than corpus linguists. They may analyze conversations, institutional talk, or various types of texts. Discourse analysts may analyze grammar (for example, considering how passives are used), conversational practices (for example, interruption or topic shifts), pragmatics (for example, how *sumimasen* is used in thanking and apologizing in Japanese), language socialization (how novices, whether children or language learners, are socialized into a speech community), or a variety of other topics. Because of their focus on language-in-use, for us, discourse analysis also falls under the umbrella of usage-based linguistics.

We need high-quality linguistic and cultural information to create effective instructional design. Because of their emphasis on real-world language as their source of information about language, usage-based linguistics provides an excellent foundation for creating materials to teach language. Our students learning Japanese want to learn to use and understand language effectively. Usage-based linguistics is a powerful tool to help them to do that, but most language students and teachers have difficulty accessing technical materials about language. This is where we step in, using these academic sources to provide us with the rich knowledge base we need to create high-quality language teaching materials (Tyler and Ortega, 2018), based on appropriate L2 linguistic concepts and cultural perspectives. Students often want to know *why* they need to follow certain grammar rules. Concept-based materials focus on meaningfulness, which provides answers to students and helps them to retain the language that they are working to learn. Ironically, trying to make it easy for learners by presenting simplified rules (which is what textbooks tend to do) can actually make things harder for learners. Oversimplification tends to divorce forms from meanings and contexts. And having to memorize rules, one by one, is a daunting task when learning a language that is very different from one's previous language background.

Applying usage-based analyses of Japanese to the development of teaching materials

There are many studies of Japanese grammar and pragmatics conducted from usage-based approaches. Kabata and Ono (2014) have applied

usage-based linguistics to investigations of Japanese grammar and discourse. The findings of discourse analysts such as Senko Maynard, Haruko Cook, and Junko Mori are available to apply to Japanese language teaching. Prior to our work on C-BLI, some SLA researchers have applied findings of usage-based linguistics to Japanese language pedagogy. Kabata and Toratani (2016) and Masuda (2018) have shown how insights from cognitive linguistics can be readily applied to studies of acquisition and teaching Japanese as an L2, and their findings are also useful for our purposes.

Our aim is to replace oversimplified rules with accessible materials based on usage-based language concepts. Visualizations of concepts, also called materializations of L2 concepts, are a core feature of our approach. These are called SCOBAs, which stands for *schemas for complete orienting basis of action* (Gal’perin, 1969, 1992), meaning that these present core concepts that students can orient to in order to do actions in the world. SCOBAs are not just visual aids—what makes them SCOBAs is that they present materializations of concepts, what Lantolf and Xi (2023: 708 and 712) call “systematic conceptual knowledge.” Usage-based linguists often create visualizations of linguistic schemas that they discover—these visualizations distill core concepts. While these can be hard for non-linguists to understand, they are a useful starting point for us in creating SCOBAs. By fleshing out their visuals that represent the kernel of a concept, we create images that are concrete, memorable, and easy for learners to understand and use.

Multiple grammars in Japanese

Most Japanese language textbooks teach written grammar for spoken use. Our preference is to teach natural spoken and written language. By applying usage-based linguistics to teaching Japanese, we can introduce students to the concept of *multiple grammars* (Iwasaki, 2015) to guide their development. Using the concept of multiple grammars, we can teach students that written and spoken Japanese have somewhat different grammars. Spoken Japanese is rich in *interactional particles* (Maynard, 1993: 183), which, in Japanese, are called *shūjoshi* ‘final particles’ or *kantō joshi* ‘interjected particles,’ like *ne*, *na*, *sa*. This is one area of instruction we cover in this volume. Meanwhile, though written Japanese requires *grammatical case particles*, like *ga*, *ni* and *o*, called *kaku joshi* ‘case particles’ in Japanese, these are often dropped in speaking (something that is generally ignored in current textbooks). Spoken grammar is particularly important to students today, who have plentiful opportunities to encounter spoken Japanese via media sources. Students are curious about the spoken language they encounter, but the language of their textbooks does not address spoken

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Japanese grammar. Usage-based linguistics provides a useful conceptual framework for building on students' curiosity about the spoken language and how it differs from written Japanese. Using the concept of multiple grammars, we can flexibly accommodate linguistic variability including written language, spoken language, and dialects in developing teaching materials.

Along with accommodating linguistic variability, usage-based linguistics also includes the notion of expressing a speaker's stance via the framing of events. In the next section, we provide an example of a foundational concept that underlies much of Japanese grammar and pragmatics. The concept is that of *construal*, or how experiences or events are perceived or framed in a language.

Construal patterns in Japanese: a foundational concept for teaching Japanese grammar and pragmatics

Language typology is an important resource for teaching foreign languages. It relates to how similar or different languages are from one another. Language typology helps us to understand commonalities across languages, as well as the concepts distinguishing them, by identifying both universal and relativistic linguistic aspects and providing cognitively motivated accounts. Japanese and English are *typologically different languages*, and this is what makes Japanese so difficult for English speakers (and vice versa).

One area of typology discussed by cognitive linguistics is *construal patterns*. Construal is our ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternative ways by shifting perspectives and prominence (Langacker, 2008a). Construal patterns are ways of framing events—"how an experience is framed...how the speaker conceptualizes the experience to be communicated, for the understanding of the hearer" (Croft and Cruse, 2004: 19).

Construal patterns in Japanese and English are fundamentally different. Japanese is a subjectivity-prominent language with ego-orientation (Iwasaki, 1993). Subjectivity-prominence relates to language that privileges a subjective perspective, while ego-orientation relates to that perspective being the speaker's. A high degree of subjectivity, combined with ego-orientation, means that the self, or subject of the sentence, generally is not stated in Japanese. To use linguistic terms, ego is generally encoded as zero (meaning it is not stated). Japanese highly prefers *subjective construal* (Ikegami, 2005, 2008) over *objective construal*. This typological fact forms the foundation for much of Japanese grammar, including the non-use of "I," motion verbs, verbs meaning "give," psychological predicates, honorifics, interactional particles, causatives, and passives. Perspective or *shiten* in Japanese (cf., Morita, 2006), which is part of

the typological notion of subjective construal, is often used in traditional Japanese studies in Japan. Providing concept-based materials for subjective construal and various structures that depend upon it forms the core of this book.

In contrast to Japanese's preference for subjective construal, English prefers framing events using *objective construal* (Ikegami, 2005, 2008). Objective construal results in explicitly stating everything, including actors (subjects) and patients (objects). It is important to note that both Japanese and English can frame events either subjectively or objectively, while, at the same time, showing a strong preference for one (subjective construal for Japanese, and objective construal for English) over the other. The following examples in English show its preference for objective construal in five contexts. For each example, a context is given; then, two sentences are provided—one objectively construed (obj), and the other subjectively construed (subj):

Example 1: The speaker is in the library, commenting on the comic books

(obj) This library has 100 comic books.

(subj) 100 comic books exist. (No mention of the library, since the speaker is in the library)

Example 2: The speaker hears the neighbor's baby crying through the window

(obj) I can hear the baby crying.

(subj) Baby's crying is hearable. (No mention of the person doing the hearing)

Example 3: The speaker is lost, and mutters to themselves

(obj) Where am I?

(subj) Here is where? (No mention of the person who is lost)

Example 4: The speaker feels cold

(obj) I'm cold.

(subj) Cold. (No mention of the person who is cold)

Example 5: The speaker needs drinks for a party

(obj) Would you bring drinks?

(subj) Come with drinks? (No mention of the person who is to bring the drinks)

As our examples show, construal differences that impact how events are framed cut across grammar and pragmatics. The objectively construed (obj) examples are all appropriate in English. In contrast, Japanese strongly prefers each of the subjectively construed (subj) versions, framing events subjectively. Teaching construal differences to beginning Japanese language learners, thus, is quite helpful to them.

Teaching subjective construal to Japanese language learners

Both English and Japanese speakers frame events either more or less objectively or subjectively, yet each language has a different tendency. English leans toward objective construal, which represents events by placing focus on the speaker or other agent. In contrast, Japanese prefers subjective construal, where the protagonist is merged into the scene as a whole and often left unmentioned, to be inferred from context. For language learners, understanding subjective construal as a foundational principle of Japanese verbal expression and communication helps to make sense of a variety of expressions in Japanese.

Figure 1.1 displays our SCOBAs for objective construal (to the left) and subjective construal (to the right). To materialize objective construal, the left-hand SCOA depicts the speaker outside the scene, represented by a circle with eyes.

Our SCOA for objective construal corresponds with, for example, how the sentence “Where am I?” is framed objectively in English; this sentence is phrased as if the speaker is looking upon the scene of themselves, lost, and includes self-mention in the sentence. Thus we have the circle with eyes, who frames the event, looking upon the entire scene. Objective construal represents an event by focusing on the particular agent/individual, i.e., the speaker who is lost. Ikegami (1991, 2016) calls this a *subject-object contrast type of construal* because subjects and objects are both mentioned in the sentence.

Moving to the right side of Figure 1.1, we present our SCOA for subjective construal, which is most often used in Japanese. Here, the circle with eyes, which frames the event, is merged into the event itself. From this perspective, the self, or protagonist, is less prominent (indicated by being shown in gray on the figure) and thus not mentioned in the utterance

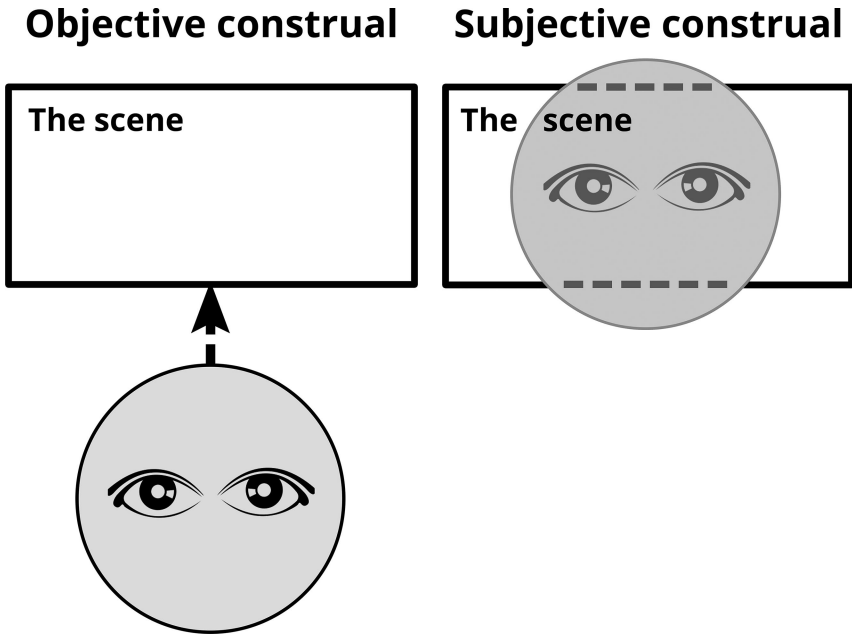


Figure 1.1 SCOBAs for objective (left) and subjective (right) construal (SCOBA 1.1. from Masuda, K. and Ohta, A. (2021: 48). Teaching subjective construal and related constructions with SCBOAs: Concept learning as a foundation for Japanese language development. *Language and Socio-cultural Theory* 8(1), 35–67.

unless necessary. Subjective construal applies not only to the self as subject, but to any protagonist, who, in Japanese, is merged into the scene once understood as present in a particular context. Using subjective construal, the Japanese equivalent of the English ‘Where am I?’ is something like ‘Where is here?’ or, in Japanese, *koko wa doko* [here TOP where]? The self is invisible to the speaker, because they are merged with the scene. The speaker’s presence is understood, and so it is unstated. This is the essence of subjective construal. Ikegami (1991, 2016) calls this type of construal *subject-object merger*; there is no need to mention who is lost. We discuss this further in Chapter 7, which focuses on teaching motion verbs.

In sum, while individuals can choose how to frame events, whether objectively or subjectively, most often this is guided by the general ways that different languages construct the world. As we present our materials for teaching Japanese through concepts in this book, we repeat our presentation of these two SCOBAs as a reminder of subjective construal

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patterns which guide how Japanese is structured, and, as mentioned above, underlies other pragmatic and grammatical properties of Japanese like the non-use of “I” as subject; psychological predicates; motion verbs, used both alone and in compound verbs; verbs meanings of ‘give,’ used both alone and in the benefactive construction; and passive verbs.

Sociocultural theory and concept-based language instruction: L2 teaching as re-mediating the mind

Thus far in this chapter, we have provided a basic introduction to the notion of C-BLI and how usage-based linguistics provides us with source material for teaching concepts. Aside from briefly mentioning and providing a couple of examples of SCOBAs, we have touched little on pedagogy. How, exactly, can we teach with concepts? We use a humanistic learning theory that integrates learning and development, called *sociocultural theory*. Sociocultural theory is the foundation for C-BLI, our student-centered pedagogy that promotes cognitive, social, and cultural development.

Sociocultural theory was developed by Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), a Soviet psycholinguist, and his colleagues, and is also known as *sociohistorical psychology* (Vygotsky, 1987)—the mediated nature of mind is the cornerstone of this theory (Wertsch, 1985). Since the mid-1980s when Frawley and Lantolf (1985) first introduced sociocultural theory to the field of SLA, research in this area has continued to grow (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; Ohta, 2013; and Swain, Kinnear, and Steinman, 2015 provide overviews). Those of us who use sociocultural theory understand language as “conceptual knowledge that may help learners more effectively to create meanings that express their particular communicative intentions” (Lantolf, 2010: 164). Sociocultural theory is a natural partner to usage-based linguistics, which is also focused on meaning-making.

Sociocultural theory is a holistic approach to language, thinking, and being in the world. Lantolf (2007: 33) describes cognitive and sociocultural processes as an “organic unity.” Human beings are understood as having both social and biological lines of development that are deeply interdependent. Human mind is thus interwoven with activity in the world through both physical and psychological/symbolic tools. And, as people use these tools, they are constantly being transformed, so they change over time. In sociocultural theory, mind is understood as “mediated.” Mediation is what physical and psychological tools do as a part of human functioning. People use physical and psychological tools to act upon, and interact in the world. Concepts are one type of psychological tool; they mediate human cognitive and psychological functioning. As we internalize new knowledge and concepts (see Chapter 2), we learn, developing socially and cognitively. Classrooms

are special places where mediation is thoughtfully used to promote development by creating opportunities for learning. For Vygotsky, learning is the engine that pulls development along. Teachers mediate student development through their language and instructional materials, while learners also mediate one another as they perform tasks in the classroom that provide a developmentally appropriate level of challenge.

Learning happens in *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) activity (Vygotsky, 1978). ZPD activity involves tailored mediational processes that are developmentally sensitive to each learner's participation; this happens through semiotic mediation by the teacher, peers, and materials as student understandings are articulated, challenged, and re-articulated as stimulated by instructional materials and tasks. This developmentally sensitive mediation is the core of ZPD activity. *Languaging* (Swain, 2006: 98) is the "process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language." By verbalizing, learners incorporate new material in their talk to themselves and with one another, constructing and internalizing new knowledge. Learning occurs as students develop independence, also called *self-regulation*. As they become self-regulated, what they could previously do only with the mediation of materials, teacher, or peers, they become able to accomplish without assistance. Language learning peers are particularly sensitive to one another, providing and withdrawing support to promote one another's development (Ohta, 2001b). Both quality and quantity of languaging relate to L2 learning (Swain, Lapkin, Knouzi, Suzuki, and Brooks, 2009); languaging may be spoken or written (Suzuki 2012; Ishikawa and Suzuki, 2016, 2023). Our C-BLI curricula, featured in this volume, involve oral and/or written languaging to facilitate language development. In our studies, both languaging and students' explanations serve as data so that we can follow the path of students' L2 development as it occurs via our C-BLI units. Languaging happens when students use written or spoken language to work through or consider concepts taught in our C-BLI units. When we ask students to write or say what they already know about a topic before teaching it, we call this explanation, not languaging, because students are not working through concepts we taught them. In sociocultural theory, moment-by-moment learning processes are called *microgenesis* (Wertsch, 1985). To learn about students' developmental processes, analysis of microgenesis can be done by looking at students' languaging as well as their L2 use. Microgenetic processes occur over a short span of time, and tracking this unfolding development provides an "analysis that returns to the source and reconstructs all the points in the development of a given structure" (Vygotsky, 1978: 64). Chapter 9 of this volume looks at oral languaging to observe the microgenetic development of a student learning a Japanese aspect marker.

For Vygotsky (1987), school learning is the site of developing scientific understandings, which he calls *scientific concepts*. Scientific concepts, rooted in essential qualities, differ from spontaneous concepts derived from everyday experience. Spontaneous concepts are also called *everyday concepts*, which are functional and empirically based (meaning that they are grounded in experience) but are often incorrect. Our language says that the sun rises and sets, and people used to believe this because it jibes with everyday experience—these are everyday concepts. Scientific concepts, in contrast, are accurate. We know through science about the solar system and planetary orbits, for example. Karpov (2003) provides another example of everyday concepts—children often think that a whale is a fish because it swims in the ocean. Then, they learn the scientific concept of *mammals* through schooling. Through scientific concepts, students learn new ways of organizing their experience and making sense of the world. In the same way, in teaching foreign languages, we need to guide students to replace their everyday concepts of language with scientific understandings. One example is replacing understandings of Japanese based on translation of concepts from English (like “there’s an active sentence for every passive sentence,” which is not true in Japanese) with scientific understandings from usage-based Japanese linguistics. Thus, students can learn the usage-based concept of *undergoing* that underlies all Japanese passives; Japanese passives express the undergoing of actions and experiences by a usually unnamed subject. As discussed earlier, SCOBAs are used to materialize concepts in order to present them multi-modally through words, pictures, and movement. The goal is to guide students to apply, internalize, and use concepts for guided L2 practice, working toward automatization of language skills.

Early studies of sociocultural theory and L2 development were highly descriptive. They focused on how semiotic mediation unfolded in classroom L2 developmental spaces. More recently, scholars of L2 and sociocultural theory are working to promote L2 development by creating materials that incorporate sociocultural learning theory into materials design and use; praxis dynamically and holistically incorporates theory, research, in a *dialectical* fashion. *Dialectical* refers to the notion of dialectics: parts of a whole that are on a dynamic continuum and cannot be separated from one another. Praxis is like a triangle, with three points: research, practice, and theory. The relationship between theory, research, and practice is like the angles of a triangle: they all are a part of the same whole, in constant interrelationship. Research and practice mediate theory. Theory and practice mediate research. And, simultaneously, research and theory mediate practice. In this triangle of praxis, relations between research, practice, and theory are constantly related through a mutual process of feedback

and give-and-take. In the world of praxis, thus, the teacher is as important as the theoretician and the researcher; and, the teacher can also simultaneously, be theoretician and researcher. The three roles mutually constitute and support one another. Without any one of these, the entire enterprise collapses (see Lantolf and Poehner, 2014).

C-BLI is built on the work of Gal'perin, one of Vygotsky's students, who developed what he called *systemic-theoretic instruction*. Systemic-theoretic instruction has been investigated in studies of school learning in a variety of subjects. C-BLI is a recent application to foreign language teaching. Materializations of concepts, via SCOBAs, are the cornerstone of C-BLI. These visual representations of concepts are used in explicit instruction and function as pivots, guiding student understandings as a concept is presented. SCOBAs also guide languaging, which happens in talk with the self and with peers, and in inner dialog during seatwork, and homework as students work to apply a concept being taught. SCOBAs are used with tasks designed to promote internalization of the new concept, practice with new language, and both conceptual and language automatization, so that students can use the concept when speaking, reading, or writing the target language.

Ohta and Masuda (2018) describe C-BLI as a process that starts with the teacher first understanding students' *orienting basis of action* (OBA). This means understanding the students' initial knowledge of the concept to be taught, including non-understandings, understandings, and misunderstandings, prior to instruction. Understanding the students' OBA is required in order to develop concept-based materials. Schematic illustrations from cognitive linguistics can provide a visual starting point to create SCOBAs, as they accurately and concisely capture the core concepts. These can be adapted to make them friendlier and more accessible to students. Findings from a range of usage-based linguistics research are helpful in the iterative process of creating SCOBAs (Ohta, 2017). When teaching, the teacher introduces SCOBA(s) along with explanations to illustrate the concept(s) to be taught. This is often done in an interactive lecture. SCOBAs take a variety of visual forms, including flow charts, diagrams, and drawings, to create a visual representation of a concept being taught. Along with introducing concepts, teachers integrate SCOBAs with tasks designed to promote ZPD activity. This generally begins during the interactive lecture and continues as students are provided more tasks with SCOBAs, explaining SCOBAs, re-creating or drawing their own SCOBAs, and analyzing and using the target language guided by SCOBAs. Tasks help students to internalize the concept and to apply it, in a dynamic and iterative fashion, moving from more to less support provided, until students can perform freely without referring to the SCOBA.

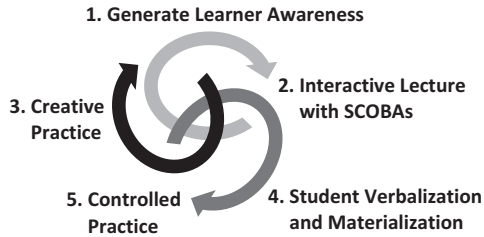


Figure 1.2 Steps of concept-based language instruction (Figure 10.1 from Ohta, A. S. (2024). Sociocultural theory and L2 discourse: From descriptive to interventionist research in SLA. In B. Paltridge and M. T. Prior (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Discourse*, 116–131. London: Routledge.

Ohta (2024) displays the classroom processes of C-BLI as shown in Figure 1.2.

Masuda and Ohta's (2021) conceptualization (see also Ohta, 2024) starts by generating learner awareness. This involves activating what students already know and raising their curiosity about the material to be taught. The instructor then uses SCOBAs in an explicit and deductive presentation of how target language works. The conceptual knowledge materialized in the SCOBAs guides L2 learners' languaging (for example, re-explaining the SCOBAs), further materialization (drawing, note-taking), controlled language practice, and creative language practice. Teachers who use C-BLI highly value creativity, because creative processes are part of what it means to be human. The looping arrows in Figure 1.2 signify how C-BLI is understood and implemented as nonlinear, iterative process of overlapping steps that promote learning and lead to development. Through this process, target L2 concepts are understood, used, and reused, resulting in internalization over time via in- and out-of-class engagement with the materials. Engaging in language tasks with L2 concepts, according to Negueruela (2008), expands connections between a concept and its use, promoting internalization. There is a growing body of research applying C-BLI to Japanese language teaching and learning (Ohta, 2017; Masuda and Iwasaki, 2018; Tsujihara, 2022, 2023). Our book builds upon this work, both further developing previous research and expanding into new areas of Japanese language instruction.

A revolution in Japanese language teaching

Our goal is to spark a revolution in Japanese language teaching by prompting scholars, teachers, and teacher trainees to work together, to critically

consider what we do and why, and to step outside of the traditional “research” and “teaching” boxes to promote student development. Our book is revolutionary for a number of reasons.

First, we acknowledge that Japanese language instruction, currently, tends to rather slavishly follow textbooks. At the same time, Japanese language learners are now, more than ever, freeing themselves from textbooks. They have ever-expanding access to authentic Japanese language materials outside the classroom. Textbooks have their usefulness, but the concept-based approach contrasts with the prescriptive, rule-driven approach of most textbooks. As students are more and more exposed to Japanese as a living, spoken language through their easy access to Japanese language media, we are rethinking Japanese language instruction and rejecting the oversimplification of current approaches. Instead, we recommend a principled, systematic, concept-driven approach to Japanese language-in-culture, including grammar and pragmatics (language in use). We are not asking people to abandon textbooks. Rather, we encourage a revolution that involves a more flexible incorporation of materials to meet student interests and their need for difficult-to-acquire items in Japanese, for which explicit instruction has been shown to be effective (Roehr-Brackin, 2015). To promote that revolution, we share our research-tested materials in this book. We invite our readers around the world to join us in using, testing, and revising materials as part of the collaborative processes of praxis, merging theory, research, and teaching.

A revolution is also occurring in the content of student interests in Japanese. Communicative language teaching assumes that students plan to use their Japanese in Japan with Japanese people. In fact, our students’ needs and motivations for learning Japanese are increasingly diverse. While students are certainly interested in developing conversational skills, they want to use Japanese to better access and enjoy Japanese cultural products such as *anime*, video games, *manga*, film, short online videos, literature, and music. We believe that learning spoken Japanese and developing conversation skills can help students to achieve non-speaking-related goals. However, instructors might want to re-think what we are doing in language classrooms in the 21st century. Are the topics in our textbooks relevant to the bulk of our students who may never visit Japan? Might teachers localize their materials by shifting to areas that are closer to student interests to support student goals? Our concept-based materials that more efficiently teach Japanese grammar and pragmatics are a step toward helping students to meet their goals.

Another area of revolution is in the area of goals for Japanese language teaching. For a long time, Japanese language teachers have implicitly set the native speaker and native-like Japanese as the goal of instruction for students. The native speaker is not a realistic model for what students can

achieve (see Chapter 3). Consistent error correction (generally without attention to teaching underlying concepts) has not been shown to have a major impact on student development. What if we tried a different approach? Our focus is on developing materials of high interest to students, teaching Japanese grammar and pragmatics conceptually, supporting students to create with language, empowering students to reflect upon their linguistic process, and providing language practice for students to use Japanese to realize their own learning goals. By rejecting native speakerism, we can guide students to make their own pragmlinguistic choices based on Japanese linguistic and cultural concepts. Our goal, thus, is to empower students by using materials that equip them on their language learning journeys. We see our concept-based materials as part of this revolution.

In terms of teaching the nuts and bolts of Japanese, our approach offers a new way to organize pragmatic and grammatical knowledge and results in a system of concepts that build upon each other in a meaningful way. This novel approach works to motivate instructors to partner with scholars by joint engagement in innovative curriculum development and/research, while helping learners to learn Japanese more effectively.

Our goal is to break new ground for instructors, researchers, and learners who are interested in both pragmatics and grammar teaching and learning, because our approach focuses on *meaning* and *languaculture* (Agar, 1994). Traditional approaches often separate pragmatics from grammar and treat pragmatics as an add-on. We value pragmatics and grammar as part of a continuum that extends from lexicon (words) to grammar (Tyler, 2012: 20); all language is part of higher cognitive processes crucial to meaning-making and interpreting the world. Understanding pragmatics and grammar as meaning-making processes provides us with a cohesive approach to understanding language. We promote conceptual understanding by organizing language into concepts, units of meaning that result in fewer rules to memorize and a more joyful learning experience (Tyler, 2012).

For example, JFL learners are generally taught that Japanese speakers rarely use “I” in conversation. Students may wonder if this is because they can recover the first-person pronoun from context or because it is omitted when talking casually. Some may think Japanese is like Spanish, which often drops “I” even though Japanese does not conjugate for person like Spanish does. As we demonstrated earlier in this chapter, understanding subjective construal provides a foundational concept that explains this fact of Japanese, while also helping students to understand other ways that Japanese works. For example, Japanese speakers talk about their own feelings, or others’ feelings, using different expressions. Traditionally, students are taught this as a rule. However, this is deeply related to the concept of subjective construal, which makes sense of why Japanese works this way. By teaching conceptually, we relate how Japanese works via meaning-based

understandings of how, in a Japanese perspective, we construe events in our daily life. The revolution is in simplifying grammar and pragmatics instruction while making them more deeply and culturally meaningful.

Our use of sociocultural theory is also revolutionary. Much of Japanese language teaching today is still built on the ideologies of Krashen and Terrell's (1983) "comprehensible input," on communicative approaches which eschew grammar instruction, or on a mixture of these combined with focus on form (Doughty and Williams, 1998). Yet, at the same time, Japanese teachers are saddled with teaching materials that are at odds with the learning theories they believe. We provide a teaching approach (concept-based language instruction), a learning theory (sociocultural theory), and a source of knowledge (usage-based linguistics) that coherently work together. Our learning theory focuses on the importance of mediation in cognitive development (including foreign language learning) and the creation and use of high-quality resources to mediate students' development. We understand meaning-making via symbolic mediation as the essence of cognition, language, culture, and human higher cognitive development. We support an explicit approach to teaching concepts. Like Ellis (2005), Lantolf and Thorne (2006), and Roehr-Brackin (2015), we see language development as a dynamic interaction between explicit and implicit knowledge of language. C-BLI's approach of explicitly and deductively presenting through SCOBAs, as shown in Figure 1.2, leads learners to develop implicit and inductive use of language through practice. Norris and Ortega (2000) also support explicit instruction as most effective. Scientific concepts, taught explicitly, are the centerpiece of instruction (along with Japanese words, phrases, and expressions, of course). Via explicit instruction, scientific concepts have the potential to transform students' language learning experience. SCOBAs lie at the intersection of usage-based linguistic content and sociocultural theory in our concept-based instructional approach and play an essential role in promoting L2 learners' development.

Overview of this book

This book presents our C-BLI work, including our curricula and studies of their use in university-level Japanese language classrooms. All the chapters of this book are co-authored by the three of us. The first three chapters are foundational. Each of the subsequent chapters presents pedagogical research on an area of Japanese language teaching, whether pragmatics (Chapters 4–6) or grammar (Chapters 7–11), ending with a concluding chapter (Chapter 12). Our pedagogical research chapters present an analysis of the area to be taught along with our concept-based materials designed to teach the particular area, followed by a study of the use of the materials in intact (seven of the chapters) or laboratory (one of the

chapters) classes. Our materials development for all chapters was a collaborative effort, involving ourselves and, of course, our students, without whom our materials development would be much less successful. At the same time, each of these chapters has a primary instructional designer, teacher, and researcher, who was the lead for that particular study.

Our book is organized into three sections. Part I (Chapters 1 and 2) presents our approach, a radical blending of theory and practice, to foreign language instruction. We merge sociocultural theory with usage-based linguistics, focused on concept-based language instruction for language teaching. The two chapters of Part I present the foundations of concept-based language instruction and usage-based linguistics (see White and Masuda (2024) for detailed discussion of the integration of those two theories). While most previous work focuses on European languages, we focus on Japanese, demonstrating the power of SCOBAs to present accurate and contextually relevant linguistic and cultural concepts. Our goal is to help readers understand L2 development as a holistic transformation of the learner's mind, as they internalize L2 concepts.

Part II (Chapters 3 through 6) focuses on the concept-based approach to teaching Japanese pragmatics. Chapter 3 provides an overview of teaching and learning pragmatics in Japanese and introduces discourse analytic and other usage-based research, presenting examples from our own research and that of others who have applied C-BLI to the teaching of pragmatics. Chapter 4 focuses on style-shifting. This chapter describes the problems with traditional approaches to honorifics and presents SCOBAs to teach style-shifting, along with research that shows the impact of these materials. Chapter 5, on teaching interactional particles with concept-based language instruction, gives an overview of L2 acquisition studies of interactional particles. The chapter then demonstrates how SCOBAs for interactional particles can be used along with drama scripts and Japanese peer interaction in Japanese language classrooms, sharing our research findings on the use of these materials. The final chapter of this section, Chapter 6, discusses speech acts in Japanese. This chapter focuses on the speech act of thanking and presents SCOBAs to help students develop L2 pragmatic competence and learner agency. Analysis of classroom use of these materials shows how students learn to apply these understandings rather than following idealized native speaker norms.

Part III (Chapters 7 through 12) explores using concept-based language instruction to teach Japanese grammar. Chapter 7 takes up subjective construal again, as a foundation for teaching motion verbs. Chapter 8 deals with benefactive constructions, which are culturally important constructions in Japanese. Chapter 9 presents the marker *teiru*, a tricky construction for students because of its wide range of meanings and usages, ranging from marking actions-in-progress to conveying aspectual meanings. Chapters 10 and 11 focus on causative and passive constructions, respectively.

These constructions, typically taught at the end of beginning Japanese courses, are also challenging to acquire. All of these chapters, along with presenting concept-based materials, report on studies of C-BLI using these instructional units with actual students. In our final chapter, we reflect on what we have accomplished here, while also moving forward by embracing learner variability and practical matters related to pedagogical change: teacher ideologies, the problem of native speaker norms, the importance of collaboration, and the compatibility of C-BLI with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for language development and assessment, which values the central roles of mediation and learner agency in plurilingual and pluricultural development.

By sharing our work, we hope that Japanese teachers, researchers, and learners will develop a new, concept-based perspective on Japanese grammar and pragmatics. Through this process, we hope to join with our readers to consider the possibilities that concept-based instruction affords for Japanese language instruction. Our hope is to inspire language instructors, researchers, and learners of Japanese to reflect on language teaching and learning, language curriculum/materials, and, by joining us on this journey through C-BLI of Japanese, to broaden their understanding of the wide variety of mediating tools available to facilitate the teaching and learning of Japanese as a second/foreign language.

A note on romanization

This volume uses the Hepburn system of romanizing Japanese, which notates long vowels, except *ei*, with a macron and consonants using English spelling conventions. A macron placed over a vowel indicates that the vowel is long (doubled in duration), for example, *ō* in *gakkō* ‘school.’

Notes

- 1 The first author of this co-authored chapter is Kyoko Masuda.
- 2 These are two names for the same approach. *Concept*-based language instruction (C-BLI, CBLI, or CBI) is not the same as *content*-based instruction (Sato, Hasegawa, Kumagai, and Kamiyoshi, 2017), which uses the acronym CBI.

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