other—readers may be inclined to ask how and under what conditions does it end. What relationship might this modernist style have to subsequent styles like postmodernism, a topic of interest to scholars Mitchell draws from in his study (Eysteinsson devotes a chapter to this topic in *The Concept of Modernism*; Harootunian's important work in *Postmodernism and Japan* is likely familiar to readers of the journal)?

Mitchell cogently argues for a renewed appreciation of the social impact of literary works, as he argues that the book "traces and clarifies how certain types of narrative fiction can make us aware of the discursive structures that undergird the imaginative relationship we have to our social world" (1). This study makes important contributions to rethinking the value and status of modernist texts in Japan and to framing our understanding of the global dimensions of modernism. It deserves to be read widely by scholars of modernism studies, Japan studies, media studies, and historians interested in literature and society in the interwar period.

Learn Japanese Online: Elementary

By **Mariko Wei** and **Atsushi Fukada**. e-Language Learning LLC. https://ellllc.com/LJO16/. $30.00/term.

Reviewed by
Hisae Matsui

Learn Japanese Online: Elementary (hereafter, *LJO*) is online material for beginning Japanese intended to be used for blended and online teaching and learning. As COVID-19 has impacted every aspect of our lives, more opportunities to use online materials have emerged in the Japanese education scene. Both instructors and students who had been reluctant to use online materials may now be somewhat less resistant to using them. Although this circumstance was probably not envisioned when the development of *LJO* began, it is an unexpectedly ideal environment for its debut. Included in *LJO* are textbooks, workbooks, audio clips, video clips, and assessment tools.

The content of *LJO* is essentially designed around the structural syllabus, although elements of the functional and situational syllabi are

also incorporated. *LJO* consists of book 1 and book 2, where the former is to be covered over two semesters of first-year Japanese and the latter two semesters of second-year Japanese. Book 1 contains thirty units with two additional units on *hiragana* and *katakana*, and Book 2 covers thirty-two units. The developers intend this curriculum to be used primarily for university students and working professionals. The main page, as entered from the student interface, contains the links for book 1, book 2, an introduction, and the *hiragana*, and *katakana* units. When students select book 1 or book 2, they can choose a unit by clicking on any unit contained in that book. Each unit contains the following six sections: (1) introductory dialogue videos, (2) new vocabulary items, (3) grammar explanations, (4) various practices, (5) introduction to Japanese culture and life, and (6) performance tests. Presumably, learners are expected to progress in the order the sections are laid out, but instructors may, of course, construct their classes in any order they wish.

Each unit begins with an introductory video showing new grammar and vocabulary items in a short drama that contextualizes the items. The short dramas in the videos are played by the development team members, covering a wide range of topics and situations such as everyday conversations at a university or workplace, shopping, and dining. While some units are connected by topic, such as self-introduction and beginning campus life, most seem to have no strong connections because the curriculum is organized based on a structural syllabus rather than a topic- or theme-based syllabus. The speed of speech in the videos is at a natural speed from the beginning, not a slower style often found in recordings for beginner-level textbooks. The videos do not have subtitles, although there is an option to display scripts and English translations.

In the vocabulary section, each vocabulary item is presented with an audio clip, not to mention the reading and meaning. There is even a video of handwriting by a native speaker on new *kanji*. Following the vocabulary section is the grammar item section where each new grammar item is explained in a short video lecture in English, ranging from three to ten minutes in length. Below the video window, there are scripts and diagrams of the grammar point from the video, followed by a grammar quiz at the end to check the student's understanding. Since there are ample supplementary materials, learning new vocabulary and grammar items can be done inside or outside the classroom.

Students can then practice their newly learned grammar and vocabulary in the practice section consisting of four types of practice:

speaking practice, listening practice, writing practice, and activities. The speaking practice covers from basic oral vocabulary practice to production practice using *Speak Everywhere*, an online oral practice and assessment platform. By using *Speak Everywhere*, students can record and submit their utterances in response to written cues for individual evaluation and feedback by the instructor. With the Listening practice, learners listen to a listening passage and respond to questions in a multiple-choice format with a fixed correct answer, and they receive correct or incorrect responses as soon as they submit their answers. In contrast, the Writing practice is a PDF worksheet with no answer keys, which learners print, write, and submit for grading and feedback from the instructor. The activities section contains a couple of tasks for conversation activities in pairs or groups, such as interviews and role-plays, and they are designed for in-person or real-time online classes. Considering the nature of learner engagement, some learning activities, such as those using *Speak Everywhere,* are better suited to be done outside of class, while those in the Activities are more suitable for in-class use. Instructors should examine which activities are most effectively practiced in class and arrange various activities so that in-class and out-of-class activities complement each other well.

Lastly, the performance test provides various tests to assess students' achievement. All of the tests are delivered using *Speak Everywhere*, in which students respond orally to written or verbal questions with visual cues. For example, students will hear *Ano tatemono wa nan desu ka* with a picture of a bank on the screen. Student responses to this prompt will need to be evaluated and given feedback by the instructor.

Since *LJO* is entirely web-based, there is no need to install any applications; however, the supported browsers are limited to Chrome and Firefox. *LJO* has a student interface and an instructor interface. Since navigating content from the student interface is fairly simple, students who have used a Learning Management System (LMS) before will have no problem accessing the content. Likewise, if instructors want to access *LJO* content available for the students, they do not need much technical knowledge; however, if they additionally wish to manage student grades, they will need to access *LJO* from the instructor interface.

The instructor interface is primarily used to track individual student's performance and keep track of their grades. It also allows the instructor to select assignments to be given as homework, as well as to access, evaluate, and provide feedback on the audio files and responses submitted by the students. The students can access the returned feedback in *LJO* from the

student interface. While the structure of the content within the instructor interface is not very complex and should not be too confusing to those who are familiar with other LMSs, it would be necessary to familiarize oneself with the system before using it for the first time. *LJO* is SCORM (Sharable Content Object Reference Model) compliant, so it can be imported to a SCORM-compliant LMS, such as Canvas and Blackboard, allowing students to log in to *LJO* from the LMS. Note, however, that *LJO* grades are not reflected in LMS grades; therefore, grade management must be done separately.

One of the most significant advantages of *LJO* is that all materials are in one place. Many of the online materials provided by publishers are supplementary materials that accompany paper textbooks, making access to them cumbersome. *LJO*, by contrast, provides easy access to textbooks, accompanying materials, homework assignments, tests, and other materials which are all organized and available in one site. It is also completely web-based, which means there is no need to install any applications, and students can access *LJO* from any computer as long as it has Chrome or Firefox.

It is also noteworthy that *LJO* incorporates a number of speaking tasks enabling learners to engage in oral practice outside of class. While conventional paper-based textbooks require students to access CDs or web-based materials accompanying the textbook to listen to audio outside of class, *LJO* is entirely web-based and provides seamless access to audio materials, making it easy for students to check pronunciation even when learning new words. *LJO* uses audio extensively, even on flashcards (available in the "Speaking practice" section). In addition, while conventional workbooks accompanying textbooks often focus on listening comprehension or writing exercises, and speaking practice is often limited to the classroom, *Speak Everywhere* in *LJO* allows students to practice speaking actively outside the classroom. Incorporating basic oral practice as preparation for class can be very effective, especially in flipped classrooms, where students are encouraged to use their in-class time to apply what they have prepared to actual speaking with classmates. Furthermore, by using *LJO*'s performance tests, the instructor does not need to spend time eliciting learners' responses or grading quizzes with fixed answers, and the instructor only needs to evaluate the learners' output, which saves the instructor time and effort.

LJO adopts a subscription model with two types of subscriptions: course-based and individual use options. The course-based subscription

costs thirty dollars per student for a course of three or more students, with no charge to the instructor. For individual use, the cost is thirty dollars for six months. *LJO* is less expensive than purchasing a typical foreign language textbook in the American market, easing the financial burden on students, and this would be one of the biggest benefits for students.

As the *LJO* has only been published for a short time, the developers should still be in the process of improvement; however, several improvements are desired at the present stage. One of the desired improvements would be to make it possible to see the entire content of the curriculum. With the current organization, a user needs to click on a unit to find out what grammar items and vocabulary are presented. Thus, it will be useful to have an index list and search function for all items in *LJO* so that students can easily refer to previously learned items.

Mobile compatibility and optimization are other areas that could be improved. Although *LJO* can be accessed from tablets and cell phones, it is not mobile optimized, making it somewhat difficult to view on smaller devices such as cell phones. Since *LJO* is a web-based application and has the advantage of being accessible anywhere at any time, it would be more convenient for many students, who have their phones with them at all times, if a mobile-optimized version were made.

Another concern at this point is the support system in case of technical problems. While some major publishers can provide extensive support when technical problems arise, it would be difficult to expect such support at *LJO*. Currently, instructors are required to be able to provide some technical support on their own if technical problems arise. Therefore, it is most desirable to have a system in place to provide support in the event of technical problems. Instructors may also need time to familiarize themselves with the instructor interface. Therefore, they need to be prepared with plenty of time. Conversely, tech-savvy instructors may find *LJO* inflexible. Although the instructor interface allows them to choose which assignments to assign, *LJO* does not allow them to change or skip the order of units, change the contents of the assignments, or add notes, and thus may not be suitable for instructors who want to customize the contents of the course they are teaching at present.

While the convenience of everything being online is a plus, there is a concern that both instructor and student will not be able to access the materials in situations where there is no Internet access. In addition, although not limited to *LJO*, a subscription model means that when the subscription period expires, nothing is left for the students, and it is not

possible to review the material later. However, this subscription model has been adopted not only by the entertainment industry but also by major publishers of textbooks for higher education, such as Pearson and Cengage, and is expected to become mainstream and a common practice for students in the future. In a world where ownership is not so important, not having physical textbooks at hand is probably not such a big issue.

Overall, *LJO* is very well designed, with a wide variety of materials and excellent audio and video quality. As long as the instructor has a good understanding of the system, it is possible to incorporate *LJO* into the classroom in no time at all. In addition, explanations of grammar that require much class time in a conventional teaching format are delivered as videos in *LJO*, so it is ideal for flipped classrooms, whether they are online or in-person. In general, it is said that improving students' oral skills tends to be challenging, especially in online classes; however, *LJO* provides ample opportunities for learners to engage in oral practice outside of class. Together with the instructor's sufficient and effective feedback to each learner, a reasonable level of oral skills can be achieved in an online class with *LJO*.

That said, some considerations must be taken into account when adopting *LJO*. Due to the web-based nature of the system, it is essential that students have access to the Internet and devices when needed. It is also desirable for the instructor to be able to respond to basic technical problems if they arise. In addition, since many of the exercises are oral and designed to be used in a course and with feedback from the instructor, self-study learners may not be able to fully utilize the features provided by *LJO*. The sequence of grammar items in *LJO* may be different from one's current curriculum, so instructors need to make some adjustments to their existing courses, as is often the case when a new textbook is adopted. Keeping the above in mind, it seems that many may find it possible to adopt *LJO* relatively quickly without significant modifications to the form of the class itself.