
Colligan-Taylor, Karen. *Living Japanese: Diversity in Language and Lifestyles* [*Ikita Nihongo: samazama na kotoba, samazama na seikatsu*].

New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007. DVD/text package. ISBN: 0-300-10958-X. Pp. 326.

Living Japanese: Diversity in Language and Lifestyles (DVD/text package) is an excellent tool for intermediate to advanced students who want to improve their listening comprehension skills in contemporary Japanese as it is spoken by native speakers. Most of the existing audio or audiovisual language teaching materials offer rehearsed speeches by one or two professional speakers scripted by foreign language educators. Accordingly, they sound very clear, smooth, and grammatically correct and are easy to understand; however, they are different from “real” Japanese. By contrast, the DVD in *Living Japanese* offers unscripted and unrehearsed speaking by 33 native speakers of Japanese, aged seven to seventy-five, who are not professional speakers, actors, or actresses, but, rather, people from all walks of life and from different geographic areas in Japan. Therefore, it is valuable and effective for training listening comprehension skills for real-life communication in Japanese, especially for those students who do not have a chance to learn Japanese by interacting with native Japanese. *Living Japanese* consists of a collection of interviews dealing with a variety of topics related to Japanese culture and society. However, unlike most audio-visual materials for Japanese language and culture, *Living Japanese* not only presents not only general concepts and commonly held ideas about Japanese culture and society, but also presents diverse perspectives and individual opinions. Topics explored include:

- Family, house, household crafts, architecture
- Issues faced by children, working women, and the elderly
- *Anime, manga*, the revival of traditional arts
- Buddhist thought on the interrelatedness of all things
- Childhood memories, including school life during World War II

The text provides background information on each topic, a complete verbatim transcript of interviews, a vocabulary list, grammar notes, and discussion questions. As the author states, *Living Japanese* embraces the Five Cs (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities) outlined in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* established by ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages). It is a great tool to improve students’ communicative skills and deepen and widen their understanding of Japanese culture and society. They can also make connections with other disciplines such as sociology, religious studies, ecology, women’s studies, linguistics, education, history, art, music, and so forth, and make comparisons with their

own culture. Some discussion questions ask the students to engage in communicating with native speakers in their own community.

The DVD and the text consist of 20 Lessons, each of which has a unique theme. The DVD offers numerous video clips relevant to the topic of the lesson, for example, slides of landscapes, houses, and popular animation characters, as well as videos of actions such as wearing a kimono. Each interviewee appears on screen in a close-up. By clearly seeing a native speaker's facial expressions, lip movements, and gestures, students can learn important pragmatic cues associated with a speech act in a natural context, as well as phonetic and phonological facts associated with pronunciation. Abbreviations, ellipses, fillers, interjections, and even misspeaking are also present, and most of them are faithfully transcribed in the text. For example, fillers like *anō* (um) are written in small font. Instances of misspeaking are also included, but in parentheses. However, the interviewer does not appear on screen, and her speech is either inaudible or just barely audible. Evidently, interactive conversational Japanese is not the main focus of this program. In addition, because this program follows an interview format, it almost always presents polite speech style (characterized by the *desu/masu* ending), and not informal speech. Thus, the users should be aware that the linguistic focus of this program is in a one-directional polite speech style, typical in interviews. Using this program, students will learn how to express their opinions appropriately, clearly, and naturally in front of other people in a relatively formal setting. Interviewees give both introductory remarks about the given topic as well as their own understanding, interpretation, and opinion of it. This approach helps students look at topics from different angles, recognize different viewpoints, and deepen and broaden their understanding of Japanese culture and society.

The text is very user-friendly. The introduction of the text includes a section called "Elements of Conversational Japanese," which lists and illustrates some of the common characteristics of conversational Japanese, such as dislocation, ellipsis, contractions, filler words, misspeaking, feedback signals, speech levels, and speech styles. Each lesson in the text starts with a helpful introduction to the topic of the lesson, as well as information about the interviewee, his/her speech style, and the context of the interview. The transcript of the recorded interview in each lesson is divided into several segments, including a time code identifying each segment. The interviewer's questions are written in the text at the beginning of each segment, marked by a Q, even though they are not recorded on the DVD. The interviewer's short responses heard on the DVD are sometimes typed in brackets { }, but many of them are not included in the text because the author wants to let students focus on the interviewee's speech. The selection of the words and phrases in the vocabulary list, as well as their translations, descriptions, and grammar/usage notes, are appropriate for intermediate/advanced students. Each lesson ends with a few questions that prompt a lively discussion among students about the topic of the lesson.

Living Japanese is multi-functional and versatile. It can be used by advanced students or intermediate students, as a self-study tool or as a classroom supplementary ancillary, to improve listening comprehension, communicative skills, vocabu-

lary, and discourse devices, and/or enrich knowledge of Japanese culture and society. Advanced students can just watch one lesson at a time on the DVD, and then engage in discussion. On the other hand, less advanced students can go over the vocabulary before they watch the DVD, if they prefer. They can watch one segment or a part of a segment at a time, instead of watching the entire lesson at once. The instructor can prepare simple listening comprehension questions (fill-in-the-blank type exercises), as the author suggests. They can also prepare true-false questions, multiple-choice questions, or simple content questions, so students can train their listening comprehension skills gradually, especially if they are less advanced students. The program is also useful for students to analyze the speech heard on the DVD and learn about the linguistic characteristics of natural spoken Japanese. Depending on students' level of preparation, the depth and the orientation of discussion can be modified. Less advanced students can simply discuss the general facts about the theme of the lesson, share personal opinions and experiences, and make comparisons with their own culture and society. But advanced students can be invited to study other disciplines such as sociology, women's studies, history, and music, all the while making use of their Japanese, making this program an excellent tool for content-based language learning.

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