

Title of Session: Benkyoukai - Progress Tracking System for the Lang. Learner

Moderator: Keiko Schneider

Guest Speaker: John Fahey

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Room: After School Online Room

KeikoSc: John sensei, we will start intro now, if you like to start...

KeikoSc: then everybody follows, OK?

KinGst5 joined the room.

KeikoSc: Kin sensei!

KeikoSc: We are just starting with intro

KinGst5: konnichiwa

JohnF: I work at the University of Texas at El Paso. I am a Technology Implementation Manager for the college of Liberal Arts.

KinGst5: ah, wakarimashita

KeikoSc: I am Keiko Schneider, organizer of benkyoukai.

KeikoSc: . o O (please follow)

JohnF: Although it is not my current job I am very interesting in Language Learning Technology.

JohnF: I would like to see a learning managed language tracking system developed.

JohnF: I see this more as a brainstorming session than a personal presentation.

JohnF: A little related information.

KeikoSc: If you haven't read his paper here it is.

KeikoSc: <http://utminers.utep.edu/jfahey/53rdbenkyoukai.htm>

JohnF: Last week I was interviewed in a debate on technology in an English writing class. The groups debated whether we need a computer on every desk? Would it be useful or wasteful? Are we too dependent on technology? Do we have too much or too little?

KeikoSc: Everybody please introduce yourselves

JohnF: I'll wait.

KarenCh: Karen Christiansen, teacher of Japanese, Canadian public secondary school

GrayspGst3: Sandy, from Oregon, Japanese teacher

ChrisHo: I teach computer science at a small university in Japan

KinGst5: I am Kin. I teach Japanese and ESL at New Paltz High School in New Paltz, NY.

EmiA: I am Emi, a community college Japanese teacher from Mesa, AZ.

KeikoSc: Is this all?

KeikoSc: Sorry about the interruption, John sensei...

PatTGst8: Patricia. I teach English at a university in Japan.

Maggi: Maggi, freelance Business #English trainer in companies in Germany

KeikoSc: If you see the text going too fast, you can make the window bigger by going to Actions...

KeikoSc points top window here

KeikoSc: and detach.

JohnF: Wow, a group a very talented people here.

KeikoSc smiles

JohnF: Is that everyone?

JeffC joined the room.

KeikoSc: Hi, Jeff, do you wanna intro yourself

KeikoSc: John sensei ,please continue

KeikoSc bows deeply

JohnF: Ok.

TrudyK: Trudy, I am an elementary school teacher in Saskatchewan Canada. I have taught ESL in Taiwan for years.

JohnF: Last week I was interviewed in a debate on technology in an English writing class. The groups debated whether we need a computer on every desk? Would it be useful or wasteful? Are we too dependent on technology? Do we have too much or too little?

JohnF: My point of view is that technology is not good or bad in the abstract. It can be used well or poorly, It can be helpful or wasteful. I believe in both old and new resources and technologies.

JohnF: Over the past decades we have witnessed an evolution of technologies from:

JohnF: Print media, paper, pencil, chalk, flash cards, books, drawings, Photographs audio recording, cassettes, to CDs, MP3. Video has evolved from film to VHS and now DVD Computer based programs act as a Universal Mediator (Dr. Frank L Borchardt, Duke University)

JohnF: Old technologies are often: Low cost, reliable, and durable

JohnF: New technologies. Large storage capacity, Fast search capability, Interactive, can link multiple media types.

GrayspGst3: Have you talked to the folks at CASLS in Eugene, Oregon?

JohnF: NO. Do you have contact info?

GrayspGst3: they have been working a lot on testing and I believe some tracking

GrayspGst3: I have a e-mail on my other computer

JohnF: I believe I have seen their website.

GrayspGst3: I can send it out, or Keiko has it

KinGst5: John ... what do you mean by "tracking"?

KeikoSc: isn't it casls.uoregon.edu?

JohnF: They develop evaluation tests for language learning.

GrayspGst3: there are also benchmarks

JohnF: I am looking the idea of a learning tracking their own progress.

ChrisHo: John, your proposed database tracks student learning. What would be the

granularity of the tracked items? Individual vocabulary words? Situations and functions?

JohnF: Ideally at every level.

GrayspGst3: I guess I was thinking of tracking with the use of benchmarks, but also a testing system

KinGst5: does tracking = feedback?

ChrisHo: I'm imagining a database of vocabulary and grammar items and such. "Tracking" learning means checking off the items learnt.

JohnF: I have not developed exact specification but I hope your input can help me.

GrayspGst3: You asked about a computer for each student, ideally if they worked all the time I think they could enhance teaching, but there are still many bugs to work out

ChrisHo: Then the system could suggest resources matching unchecked items: Items one could profitably study.

GrayspGst3: tracking, to me, means, figuring out what I know

JohnF: Yes, that is part of what the students were debating. Were they worth it for the time and money.

JohnF: Yes figuring out what I know , what I need to learn and where I can find it.

GrayspGst3: we have two conversations going

KeikoSc: Let's have John sensei tackle one by one.

JohnF: Let's focus on the tracking idea now.

KeikoSc: No further question until he is done, please..

ChrisHo: The goal is to make a picture of a student's state of progress, even when students study various separate materials and courses, right?

JohnF: Yes, that's it.

KinGst5: is this an administrative tool or an evaluative tool?

GrayspGst3: what ones studies and what one knows are not always the same, so if a student tracks what he studies, how does he know he really knows it?

JohnF: I see it a tool for independent learners

JohnF: A preliminary project would be to start to catalogue available resources.

JohnF: The amount of resources for language learning available both in traditional and in digital format is vast. There is a need for a comprehensive electronic catalogue of these resources.

JohnF: Including traditional resources. i.e. Books. Several postings to the Sensei online list this morning were descriptions of books on Japanese language and culture. It could be useful to keep an online group bibliography of books and other resources related to language learning.

ChrisHo: And this catalog would index these materials by the items taught?

JohnF: They could be indexed in multiple ways including by items taught.

ChrisHo: It could give advice like "If you want to learn concept X or grammar point Y, you could read books A, B, or C, right?"

JohnF: Excellent.

GrayspGst3: the Oregon group has done some catalog of material

ChrisHo: Other ways of indexing would be by level (pre-requisites), teaching philosophy?

JohnF: Yes.

JohnF: It could also apply to other media.

ChrisHo: But this catalog would be formal, a mathematical database, and not a set of textual descriptions of the materials.

KarenAro: Back in '96, we started a project (much smaller in scope but similar in objectives) at the school I used to teach. It took 3 of us a year and half to index, cross-referencing, by level, just the resources available at the 3 schools. Would it be possible for independent learners to include resources as well?

ChrisHo: The formality would allow it to be automatically updated by testing, and support very specific queries.

KeikoSc: We have to combine the effort somehow. A lot of folks are doing separately

JohnF: I think so. If we combine the efforts of many participants online.

ChrisHo: Could the database be constructed automatically? Perhaps a program could

search texts for vocabulary items, or forms of words, ...

JohnF: Yes, for material that is already in electronic form.

JohnF: Here's a simple example using Japanese songs.

JohnF: The web site, "Japanese Songs" was established for Japanese Language learners. 56 songs, including children's songs and folk songs, which Japanese people know well, can be heard.

JohnF: http://www.isc.toyama-u.ac.jp/~hamada/song/song_top_e.html

JohnF: They can be sorted by language level.

ChrisHo: So this proposal is for not a collection of materials, but an index into pre-existing materials, right?

KeikoSc . o O (blue text is a hyper link if you want to click...)

JohnF: Yes, but also a means for individuals to keep tracks of specific informations of what they have accomplished.

JohnF: Including vocabulary items, grammar items etc.

ChrisHo: The Japanese Songs website is very nice. But is this an example (part of) your database? I was imagining something at a much finer grain...

JohnF: No, this is still at the conceptual level.

JohnF: I also envision tracking fine details.

ChrisHo: I suppose students could use reminders to review the things they'd already "accomplished". This database reminds me a bit of a flash-card program, a program that keeps track of what students have studied when, (and periodically reminds them to review).

ChrisHo: It also reminds me of Intelligent Tutor Systems.

JohnF: A flashcard program that can exchange data to the main tracking application.

KarenAro: a doubt I have: if working cooperatively over the internet, how would the coherence of indexing be kept? I mean, would the standards for classifying material be established by whom, and how?

JohnF: Mainly a way for various language learner applications to exchange data about the learner.

ChrisHo: ITSs maintain models of "what students know" and the subject domain, and teaching methods. So far that sounds a lot like your proposal. What's different?

KeikoSc . o O (a lot of good questions)

ChrisHo: Re standards, it would be easy for everyone to agree on vocabulary items, right? (Database keys could be L1 or L2 words).

JohnF: I would like to see what they have done.

GrayspGst3: what about functions of a language

JohnF: Perhaps using XML to create a common database format.

JohnF: Can you elaborate on "functions of a language"?

GrayspGst3: I think as a learner, I want to know what I can do

ChrisHo: So, more concretely, you'd be proposing the FLKMS dialect of XML?

ChrisHo: (Foreign Language Knowledge Markup Language =)

JohnF: You are ahead of me.

GrayspGst3: for example, how to state what I want, vs knowing vocab words

JohnF: That may be just what I am looking for.

ChrisHo: There are a couple of old XML representations of academic knowledge, used mainly as formats for quiz programs. I wonder if these might fit your bill...

KeikoSc chuckles about FLKMS

JohnF: I would like to look into them further.

ChrisHo: (Can someone suggest a name nicer than FLKMS? =)

JohnF: There are many applications that store progress locally with the application but to share it with other programs would be great.

ChrisHo: What about SCORM? Is that too low level?

KeikoSc tries to pronounce FLKMS

JohnF: Can you explain SCORM?

KeikoSc: hold it, alphabet soup

KarenAro: (I got my tongue tied as well!)

KeikoSc: Could you explain tech guys?

JohnF: HE will have to because I don't know that one.

ChrisHo: Not too well. I think it's a standard to communicate between quiz programs and databases. Most of the CMSs (Course Management Systems, e.g., Moodle) seem to support it these days...

KeikoSc: Sooo kind of like middleware to have application and database communicate each other?

KeikoSc: . o O (middleware)

JohnF: I am looking at this from the user point of view. What information would be useful to track.

ChrisHo: Right! Well, a protocol rather than middleware.

KeikoSc: tries to conceptualize

ChrisHo: Vocabulary seems obvious, and easy

AndreaGst7: SCORM will allow apps such as those created in Flash to communicate with Course Management systems (i.e. send scores)

ChrisHo: I think all could agree on using L2 words as keys

GrayspGst3: vocabulary is just a list what can be done with the language would be helpful

ChrisHo: But harder to formalize

ChrisHo: Harder to get everyone's agreement

ChrisHo: maybe that would be the hard part of this proposal - the meat

GrayspGst3: I don't understand agreement?

JohnF: There are many off-the-shelf applications that can be used for basic tracking.

ChrisHo: Agreement = all participants (indexers) could use the same vocabulary words.

We wouldn't need to negotiate.

GrayspGst3: I know students who studied Spanish for years and know lots of vocab, but can't do much with it

JohnF: Long term, that is necessary.

ChrisHo: OTOH, it would be harder to agree on rules for denoting, say, grammar rules, or situations.

GrayspGst3: but lang is more than vocab is it not?

JohnF: Yes.

ChrisHo: So tests are an important part of this system. We need tests more sophisticated than vocabulary flash cards.

JohnF: (in Dictionary form, by categories, by usefulness, by level of difficulty)

JohnF: How to list vocabulary: (in Dictionary form, by categories, by usefulness, by level of difficulty) or all.

ChrisHo: A word is a rich thing

JohnF: Tests are important. We need feedback on what has been learned.

GrayspGst3: and meanings of words change in context

ChrisHo: Sound, related words, usage examples, collocations, ...

GrayspGst3: context

KarenAro: I believe we would be then dealing with two basic challenges: 1) searching/creating an application that could track and integrate built-in tracking provided by other applications, and 2) working on the classification of available material - and deciding whether to include a (sort of) self-testing component so the independent learner can have feedback

KarenAro: is that the idea?

GrayspGst3: I am sure there are other tests out there, but the online test in Oregon does do some of that

JohnF: All of these are important and they all exist in various places but can they be integrated?

ChrisHo: Following up on 2, we also need 3) classifying materials. This is a big big project. Hopefully it can be (at least partially) automated

ChrisHo: One way to integrate would be to come up with some master plan (like FLKML) and encourage people to use it. But both these tasks are hard.

JohnF: I believe a lot of it can be automated.

ChrisHo: Another approach would be to somehow unify existing classifications. This might be harder technically, but once this problem is solved, we're done

JohnF: And the offline material can be integrated with contributions from authors and users.

EmiA: John Sensee, do you have a rough idea how we can pursue for this type of project--university? organization? funds?

JohnF: Yes, even stating be bringing together a few components.

ChrisHo: Besides making an index, John, are you thinking about collecting the materials themselves? To make sort of a JFL portal site or software meta-package?

KarenAro: sort of 'the Linux-way'?

JohnF: On my part. I plan to start by cataloging the resources I have and putting that online. And then seeing who else might be interested.

ChrisHo: One complaint about Linux is the lack of standardization: All the various programs people contribute use idiosyncratic interfaces. That wouldn't work here. I think we'd need more central organization: Use this format!

JohnF: We can work with existing sources.

ChrisHo: Might there be copyright problems? Or materials disappearing (from the web or bookshelves)?

GrayspGst3: if there are folks who have already started such projects, what about bringing them together?

JohnF: That is an issue. We could start with Public Domain resources.

ChrisHo: Making your own database is, I fear, a huge job, but if on top of that you decide to make or even collect all the materials, it becomes an even bigger job

ChrisHo: Maybe it'd be good to shrink the project at first, focusing on some small subset of learners...

JohnF: I agree.

JohnF: That's where I plan to start.

JohnF: With my own personal resources.

ChrisHo: To get really concrete, what if we got Jim Breen's permission to use his lexical database? Might that make a nice start?

KarenAro: a way to make it easier would be to make it interesting for those with databases to make them available through the to-be-created application.. maybe?

JohnF: That would be great. We would have to prepare first.

ChrisHo: Then we could find a program to make vocabulary lists from (online) texts, indexing them on the headwords in Breen's dictionary.

KarenAro: what would be the advantages of being part of such an application/catalogue?

JohnF: Excellent.

ChrisHo: Good question, Karen. This reminds me of SuperMemo.net

ChrisHo: SuperMemo is a flash-card program

ChrisHo: But various third parties sell databases in the SuperMemo format

ChrisHo: So subscribing to SuperMemo's standards gives database sellers a large potential market

KarenAro: specific databases could be made available in extra components...

ChrisHo: If this database format becomes popular, it could compell authors to publish in it

KarenAro: exactly!

KeikoSc contemplates

JohnF: I would like to see an open format,

KeikoSc looks at the clock.

KeikoSc: It is just about the time I asked John sensei to spend time with us.

KeikoSc: Any last question or last comments?

GrayspGst3: thanks for your ideas

ChrisHo: So work to be done includes (1) defining the format (2) collecting the materials (3) indexing the materials in the database format (4) making quiz programs to find which parts of the database are known and (5) other programs which suggest resources teaching parts of the database NOT yet known

JohnF: I think there could be room for both free programs and commercial programs to share user progress info without a proprietary system.

ChrisHo: So (1) should be open

ChrisHo: That's a lot of work; a big project!

JohnF: Thank You, you all have great ideas. I hope I can get more information from you and links to some of the projects you mentioned.

KarenAro: but really interesting!

ChrisHo: Are you particularly interested in one of these steps? Or am I forgetting others?

KarenAro: where are we going to have the follow-up for these possibilities available? John Sensei's site?

JohnF: I am interested in all the steps you mentioned. I hope we can follow up on this and least start with a few simple projects.

KeikoSc: If you are not a member of senseiOnline, anybody here is welcome to join and continue the conversation in mailing list format. Just write to me at kschnei@sabotenweb.com

ChrisHo: Prototyping the format and databases and programs?

JohnF: I can post information on my web space and if this gets more advanced then we can look at other options.

ChrisHo: Maybe a Wiki or community Blog

GrayspGst3: I have to go, thanks again

KarenAro: My office space here at Tapped In can also be used - welcome to use the whiteboard to leave messages, addresses, etc.

JohnF: You are more knowledgeable than me. I am thinking of starting with simple off-

the shelf materials but would appreciate your expertise.

KeikoSc: Also transcript of this discussion will be posted as PDF format at TI transcript page, which also you can access from [benkyoukai](#) page.

ChrisHo: Thanks, John!

KeikoSc smiles to Karen

KeikoSc: Thank you so much for your participation!

KeikoSc bows and claps to John sensei.

JohnF: We can follow up with email.

KarenAro: thank you all - it was really good to be here and meet you!

KeikoSc: Chris, are you on senseiOnline?

KeikoSc: Karen?

JohnF: You can use jfahey717@gmail.com for this purpose.

KarenAro: yes

KeikoSc smiles

ChrisHo: I'm on the J-TEACH (?) mailing list - is that different?

JohnF: Yes

KeikoSc: Yes, if you give me the address, I will hook you up.

KeikoSc grins

ChrisHo: My email address?

KeikoSc nods

JohnF: <http://www.sabotenweb.com/bookmarks/about/senseiOnline.html>

KeikoSc: Write to me at kschnei@sabotenweb.com

KeikoSc: onegai shimasu.

ChrisHo: Yoroshiku!

KeikoSc: Kinjo daigaku

KeikoSc: I should know somebody from there...

ChrisHo: Yes

KeikoSc: COOL, thanks for coming.

KeikoSc: Great to have you here.

KarenAro: Thank you all again! Bye!

KeikoSc: John sensei, thank you for your contribution.

KeikoSc: GREAT discussion today

JohnF: Thank you.

EmiA: Thank you!