

Title and Abstract (150)

Curriculum-aligned AI language partner to support student-centered learning in Japanese. This project will develop and pilot a standards-based, curriculum-aligned AI language partner that engages students in level-appropriate conversation and role-playing built around instructor-supplied content to support student-centered learning. During conversation, students interact with the partner exclusively in Japanese, choosing either voice or text to match their learning preferences. At the end of each session, the tool provides immediate feedback to encourage deeper understanding and critical thinking about Japanese language use. A functioning version of the tool will be developed in Summer 2025 and piloted across multiple levels of Japanese, including lower-division General Education and upper-division courses for majors, during the 2025–2026 academic year. Designed with scalability in mind, the project supports ethical, accessible, and meaningful AI integration and establishes a framework for future expansion to additional language skills and other world languages at CSUN or elsewhere in the CSU.

Goals and Rationale (223)

Our goal is to develop and pilot a curriculum-aligned, AI-powered language partner that supports student-centered learning in Japanese through conversation and role-playing. The tool is designed to expand opportunities for students to use Japanese meaningfully outside of class hours, helping to bridge the gap between limited in-person contact and the practice necessary to build communicative competence.

During conversation, students engage with the AI partner exclusively in Japanese, simulating real-world exchanges. The tool does not supply direct answers or translations; instead, it supports learning through recasting, clarification, and scaffolding that mirror authentic communication strategies. To ensure accessibility and accommodate diverse learning preferences, students may choose voice or text interaction and select their preferred display format—romaji, kana only, or kana with kanji. At the end of each session, the AI partner transitions to a feedback phase—delivered in English or another preferred support language—offering targeted advice, alternative phrasing, and study recommendations to encourage deeper understanding and critical thinking.

By aligning prompts and tasks with instructor-supplied vocabulary, grammar patterns, and Can-Do statements, the tool ensures that student interaction is focused, level-appropriate, and learner-centered. At the same time, it remains flexible enough to support various textbooks, curricular decisions, and future expansions to additional skills or languages. Meanwhile, faculty and student assistant involvement in the design process establishes a collaborative model for future AI-enhanced learning projects.

Timeline (184)

Summer 2025, Development and Testing

- Develop and refine the AI Language Partner's conversational logic, role-playing scenarios, etc.
- Align activities to course-specific Can-Do statements, vocabulary sets, and grammar targets
- Build an accessible interface offering both spoken and text-based interaction options
- Conduct iterative internal testing to ensure functioning version of AI partner
- Collaborate with campus instructional technology support or CSU AI Commons on voice/text integration

Fall 2025, Pilot, Phase 1

- Deploy the tool for student use in JAPN 101, 102, 201, and 300
- Provide students with orientation and guidance on tool usage
- Gather early feedback through informal surveys, usage logs, and faculty observation
- Begin adjusting conversation scenarios and support strategies based on student responses

Spring 2026, Pilot, Phase 2

- Continue deployment in JAPN 102, 202, and 304
- Extend conversational tasks appropriate to each course's increasing proficiency targets
- Implement mid-year updates and refinements based on fall pilot feedback
- Collect broader feedback, including targeted interviews or focus groups with students

Spring 2026, Reporting

- Finalize evaluation of tool effectiveness on student engagement and communication skills
- Prepare final documentation and scalability plan
- Submit project final report to CSU Chancellor's Office

Benefits to Students (191)

This project addresses a critical need for increased student-centered communicative practice in Japanese at CSUN. With students attending in-person classes only twice per week, many face challenges developing the oral proficiency and confidence needed to succeed in real-world settings. The AI Language Partner offers an accessible, low-stakes environment for students to use Japanese meaningfully and authentically outside the classroom.

By engaging students in conversation and role-playing aligned with course content, the tool reinforces vocabulary, grammar, and communicative functions taught across the Japanese language curriculum. Allowing students to choose between voice and text interaction—and to select their preferred script display—further supports diverse learning styles and accessibility needs.

Beyond linguistic skill-building, the tool fosters critical thinking about language use, sociocultural appropriateness, and self-expression. Students must negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, and reflect on communication strategies during the feedback phase at the end of each session. The AI partner functions not as a tool for rote practice, but as a co-participant in active, learner-centered language development.

Aligned with ACTFL’s World-Readiness Standards and the P21 World Languages Skills Map, the tool also supports broader learning goals: cultural awareness, interdisciplinary connections, and lifelong learner autonomy.

Expected Outcomes (186)

By the end of the 2025–2026 academic year, the project expects to achieve the following outcomes:

- Deployment of a flexible, accessible AI language partner that engages students in level-appropriate spoken and text-based interaction across three Japanese course sequences (JAPN 101/102, 201/202, and 300/304).
- Seamless integration of conversational prompts and role-play scenarios with instructor-provided vocabulary, grammar, and Can-Do statements.
- Increased student engagement in out-of-class language use, supported by usage data, survey feedback, and informal assessments of learner confidence and skill development.
- Greater support for accessibility and learner autonomy through customizable interaction modes (voice or text) and display formats (romaji, kana, or kanji).
- Evidence of AI-supported critical thinking, as reflected in conversation logs and debrief sessions where students demonstrate awareness of their language strategies, choices, and learning progress.
- Foundational groundwork for future scalability, including documentation of design processes, student feedback, prompt engineering practices, and a roadmap for extending the tool to additional language skills and programs.

The project will culminate in a formal evaluation, showcase event and faculty workshop, and final report to the CSU Chancellor’s Office.

Focus on Enhancing Teaching and Learning with AI Tools (456)

This project addresses the CSU's AI Educational Innovations Challenge by developing an innovative application of generative AI that deepens critical thinking, supports AI literacy development, and encourages ethical and responsible AI use within the context of Japanese language learning. Rather than using AI simply to automate rote practice, the language partner engages students in immersive, meaning-driven conversations where they must make decisions, solve problems, and manage ambiguity—key components of both communicative competence and critical thinking.

By speaking or writing exclusively in Japanese with the GPT, students are required to negotiate misunderstandings, reformulate responses, and reflect on how best to express meaning using the vocabulary and grammar at their disposal. In this way, the tool reinforces not just linguistic accuracy, but also awareness of tone, appropriateness, and social context. The GPT responds with level-appropriate scaffolding—clarification requests, recasts, or modeling of natural phrasing—mirroring the types of adaptive feedback learners might receive in real human interaction. Crucially, the tool does not provide translations or direct corrections during conversation, ensuring that students stay in the target language and remain cognitively engaged with the communicative task.

Each interaction concludes with a feedback phase in English (or a preferred support language), where the GPT offers targeted reflection: suggesting alternative expressions, highlighting patterns of success or confusion, and prompting students to consider what strategies worked well and what could be improved. This post-session metacognitive layer is essential to the project's focus on deep learning. It enables students to become not only more proficient speakers of Japanese, but also more reflective and intentional language users.

Through this design, the project ensures that students are learning with and from AI, not using it to bypass effort or understanding. The tool supports student-centered learning by giving learners autonomy in how they engage—via voice or text—and how they view their own language output. These design choices reflect an ethical stance on AI use: one that emphasizes transparency, learner agency, and pedagogical integrity.

The project also contributes to defining AI literacies and competencies within the discipline of language education. Faculty and students involved in development and testing will explore how generative AI can be used productively in support of curricular goals, what its limitations are in interpersonal contexts, and how to manage its biases and tendencies toward hallucination. These insights will directly inform how we teach students to be responsible users of AI tools—not just in Japanese, but across their academic and professional lives.

Finally, the project offers a replicable model for ethical AI integration into curriculum design: one that positions AI as a collaborator in learning, not a crutch, and that prepares students to

make thoughtful, informed choices about how they use AI in a multilingual, multicultural, and increasingly AI-mediated world.

Program Scalability (416)

Our AI language partner for Japanese is designed with scalability and adaptability across the CSU system in mind. Although initially piloted in Japanese courses at CSUN, the project's flexible, modular model of AI-supported, student-centered learning is curriculum-aware but textbook-agnostic and content-flexible. This makes it readily adaptable to a variety of world language programs and instructional contexts across the CSU.

The tool's underlying architecture separates **conversation logic from content**, allowing instructors to supply their own materials—vocabulary lists, grammar points, role-play scenarios, and Can-Do statements—to generate customized conversational experiences tailored to their specific courses. Instructors should not need to modify the underlying code or GPT model; instead, they can adapt the tool's functionality by uploading new prompt structures and interaction parameters aligned with their program's scope and sequence. In principle, this approach would require only light GPT prompt engineering and content repackaging by faculty or instructional designers—no advanced technical skills or platform redevelopment.

The tool also reflects CSU-wide priorities around **equity and accessibility**. Students can choose between text-based or voice interaction and select their preferred transcript format—romaji, kana-only, or kana with kanji—ensuring that learners at different stages of literacy and fluency can participate meaningfully. The tool's flexible interaction makes it broadly accessible to students with diverse scheduling constraints, learning preferences, linguistic experiences, and comfort levels with spoken interaction.

In addition, the project emphasizes **reusability and transparency**. All instructional materials developed over the course of the pilot—including customizable prompt templates, scaffolding strategies, feedback models, evaluation rubrics, and user documentation—will be organized into a shared, open-access resource archive. This will make it easier for other programs and campuses to replicate, adapt, or build upon the project without having to start from scratch.

To support this expansion, the team will produce a **scalability handbook** at the end of the pilot year, documenting not only implementation successes but also challenges and lessons learned. This document will serve as a practical guide for instructors and departments seeking to design their own versions of the tool, or to adapt the model to other world languages and skill areas such as listening, reading, or writing.

In sum, this project does not propose a one-off solution, but rather a **scalable, replicable framework** for integrating AI into world language instruction in ways that are sustainable, ethical, and learner-centered. It reflects the CSU's mission to broaden access to high-quality

learning experiences and to equip students—and faculty—with the tools and mindsets they need to thrive in an AI-enhanced educational landscape.

Evaluation Plan (374)

AI Tools & Purpose

The project will utilize a customized OpenAI GPT model to generate dynamic, level-appropriate conversation prompts and feedback for students, simulating a live, curriculum-aligned conversation partner in Japanese. The tool will integrate speech-to-text technology (OpenAI Whisper or a comparable platform) to allow spoken input, and text-to-speech (TTS) for spoken output, supporting both voice and text interaction. These technologies will be used to create immersive, responsive learning environments that promote student-centered, critical engagement with language.

Effectiveness Measures

The project's impact will be assessed through a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures:

- Usage tracking: Number of sessions initiated, duration of interaction, and choice of interaction mode (voice vs. text) will be recorded to monitor engagement patterns.
- Student surveys: Students will complete short, anonymous surveys measuring perceptions of confidence, enjoyment, perceived learning gains, and comfort using AI as a conversational partner.
- Faculty observation: Instructors will gather anecdotal evidence and reflections on student participation, performance, and attitudes toward AI-supported language practice.
- Focus groups: Small groups of volunteer students will participate in guided interviews to explore deeper insights into how the tool affected their language development and critical engagement with technology.
- Performance sampling: Students may complete short, reflective performance tasks (e.g., roleplays) before and after tool use to identify growth in fluency, complexity, or risk-taking.

Learning & Ethical Use

The tool's design encourages students to critically engage with AI as a communicative partner, not as a passive source of answers. Students will need to navigate misunderstandings, request clarifications, and reflect on their language strategies during post-session feedback. Surveys and interviews will include targeted questions on students' perceptions of their own critical thinking development and AI literacy. Faculty members will also document lessons learned about framing ethical, responsible AI use within language curricula, contributing to scalable AI literacy frameworks for world language instruction.

Social & Cultural Impact

The project aims to prepare students for an increasingly AI-mediated world by modeling ethical

and reflective interaction with AI technologies. Through immersion in cross-cultural, real-world communication simulations, students will not only improve their Japanese language skills but also build awareness of how AI can facilitate, challenge, and reshape intercultural understanding. Faculty involved in the project will be better equipped to design and evaluate AI-enhanced learning experiences across the language program.

Budget Narrative (482)

This project requests Tier 2 funding to support the development, piloting, and evaluation of a curriculum-aligned AI language partner for student-centered learning in Japanese. Funds will primarily support faculty and student salaries, modest consulting costs for technical integration, necessary materials and supplies, and project dissemination through year-end events.

Faculty stipends are the largest component, reflecting significant time commitments for two faculty members across both summer 2025 and the 2025–2026 academic year. During the summer, faculty will design conversational scenarios, align tasks with curricular goals, build and test prompt logic, develop evaluation instruments (surveys, focus group protocols, etc.). During the academic year, both faculty members will supervise tool deployment, coordinate student assistants, gather evaluation data, iterate design improvements, and oversee project assessment and reporting.

Student salaries will fund four assistants, including learners of Japanese in computer science and at least one Japanese international student, to assist with usability testing, prompt evaluation, conversation review, facilitation of student interviews and focus groups, and student troubleshooting.

A **technologist/consultant** will be contracted, as needed, to assist with integrating speech-to-text, text-to-speech, and API services into the tool’s framework. Approximately 60 hours of consulting work is budgeted to ensure proper technical setup and address any accessibility considerations.

Materials and supplies funds will cover costs associated with API usage (e.g., GPT prompts, Whisper speech recognition, text-to-speech engines), lightweight hosting or platform subscriptions (if needed), and educational resources for faculty professional development (such as books or publications related to AI literacy, task-based language learning, and ethical AI integration). Although CSU agreements may cover some AI tool access, we have budgeted conservatively to ensure availability.

A small **accessibility/contingency** category is included to address potential accessibility needs, adaptive tool licensing, or unforeseen costs associated with ensuring that the tool is usable for all students, including those with disabilities.

In addition to tool development and deployment, the project will conclude with a **year-end showcase event** designed to demonstrate the AI language partner in action and share insights from the pilot across three Japanese course sequences. The event will highlight outcomes, present student experiences, and promote discussion of AI-supported, student-centered learning across disciplines. Funds will support logistical needs such as space, technological support, and the creation of promotional and educational materials. We also anticipate inviting a speaker with expertise in AI-enhanced pedagogy or critical language teaching to contextualize the project's significance for the broader CSU community.

To build on this momentum, we will also host a **showcase-adjacent hands-on workshop** for language faculty in CSUN's Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures. This event will introduce participants to the process of designing their own curriculum-aligned GPT tools, with guided time for initial brainstorming and materials development. Modest stipends will be provided to participants to support their time and signal the project's commitment to collaborative, faculty-led innovation. Funding for this workshop is included under "other professionals," reinforcing the project's emphasis on long-term, department-level capacity building.

Estimated Budget

1. Salaries

\$3,550, Faculty Stipend (Summer, Lead PI)
\$7,100, Faculty Stipend (Summer, Co-PI)
\$9,954, Faculty Release Time (AY, Lead PI)
\$10,650, Faculty Stipend (AY, Co-PI)
\$14,000, Student Assistants (Summer & AY)
\$1,000, Other Professionals (Year-end events)
\$4,000, Technologist/Consultant (audio integration, platform support)

2. Benefits

\$993, Faculty additional pay at 4.45%

3. Materials & Supplies

\$3,500, API access & hosting fees (if needed), educational materials
\$1,500, Compliance (accessibility needs, adaptive tools, if required)

4. Other

\$3,000, Year-end events (showcase, workshop)
\$600, Background checks

Total Estimated Budget

\$59,847
