

JALT News Special

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A Brief History of JALT

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This year, the Japan Association for Language Teaching holds its Silver Anniversary conference in Maebashi, Gunma. As we gear up for the celebration, let's take a look back. It all began when teachers got together to exchange ideas at LIOJ, the Language Institute of Japan, in Odawara, not knowing they were about to create one of the largest, most effective language education associations in Japan.

JALT does not have a birth certificate, and its exact beginnings are unclear. The first JALT language conference was held at LIOJ in July, 1975, but some date JALT's founding from a previous conference at LIOJ, when the idea germinated and planning began. Over the years, the 1974 date has become accepted, and therefore JALT99 marks JALT's 25th anniversary.

Records do clearly show that Tom Pendergast was the first president, when a group of about 50 teachers in Kansai formed the Kansai Association of Language Teachers (KALT) in 1976. As more members joined, what started as a collective of teachers developed into an organization with a solid structure and purpose.

Then David Bycina and Doug Tomlinson founded the Kanto Association of Language Teachers in Tokyo, and around the same time, Charles Adamson started the Tokai Association of Language Teachers in Nagoya. In 1977, representatives of the three groups got together to form The Japan Association of Language Teachers, a national, not-for-profit organization, with an annual conference and a constitution with bylaws. With approximately 300 members nationwide, JALT then became the first Asian affiliate of TESOL.

The next chapter was the Chugoku or Hiroshima Chapter, started by Marie Tsuruda in 1978. In the same year, Timothy Lewis started the Kyushu Chapter, and Bonnie Hamn started the Shikoku Chapter. The organization had grown to almost 1,000 members. As new chapters formed, JALT became a national organization instead of an affiliation of local ones, and *The JALT Newsletter* became a monthly publication.

Around this time, a prominent Japanese educator proposed that JALT restrict membership to foreigners and that the Japanese members set up their own organization. Communication would be easier, he suggested, with two organizations working side by side, one in English and the other in Japanese. The executive committee, however, decided to keep JALT open to all, regardless of nationality, language, or place of teaching, work, or study.

In 1983, *The JALT Newsletter* appointed a Japanese editor, leading to an increase in articles in Japanese. In 1984, it became *The Language Teacher*. Of all major language teaching organizations such as TESOL or

IATEFL, JALT alone produces a monthly publication, as well as annual and semi-annual ones.

During the 80s, JALT took its present form: Japanese involvement in JALT grew, and a Japanese national chaired the JALT85 international conference. The Bilingualism and Multilingual National Special Interest Group formed, soon joined by Video and Global Issues. JALT expanded to more than 30 chapters from Okinawa to Hokkaido, became a branch of IATEFL, and developed relationships with other language organizations. The JALT Central Office took over many routine operations and developed the procedures used today. JALT89, at Notre Dame Seishin University in Okayama, was the first conference held outside the Kanto, Kansai, or Tokai region.

Though the mature JALT remains essentially the same, it went through changes during the 90s. The current office manager, Junko Fujio, was hired in 1992 and a full-time financial manager, Motonobu Takubo, was hired in 1998. At one point, the organization's reserves totaled more than 44 million yen. Then the bubble economy burst. Meanwhile, the costs of services and materials for publications had increased. The annual conference had become too large for academic sites and had to use costly commercial ones. Many foreign teachers lost jobs and left Japan. Ad revenues shrank as textbook companies merged. Then economies throughout Asia collapsed, and with them their textbook markets and publishers' advertising budgets. JALT's accounting procedures were inadequate to deal with these problems, and with reserve funds depleted, we faced a financial crisis. Larry Cisar took over as National Treasurer and with the financial steering committee brought expenses under control. JALT prepares to enter a new millennium with a balanced budget, operating in the black.

Meanwhile, JALT expanded to 39 chapters and over 3,400 members, including almost 70 Associate and Commercial Members. Its SIGs cover 16 fields.

JALT94, in Matsuyama on Shikoku, was the first conference held off the main island of Honshu. In 1997, JALT led development of the first Pan Asian Conference in Bangkok, to be followed by the second at Seoul this October, the third in Kitakyushu in 2001, and the fourth tentatively Taipei in 2003. JALT's Asian Scholar Exchange Program brings teachers from Asian countries to meet teachers and speak throughout Japan and at the annual international conference.

What does the future hold? JALT will become one of the first nonprofit organizations recognized by the Japanese Government under the 1998 NPO Law. As finances come under control, JALT seeks more and better ways to serve and increase its membership and to improve ties with other Asian countries through the Pan Asian Conferences and exchange programs.

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