

# Student Awareness and Usage of English Predictive Text on Mobile Devices

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## Abstract

Mobile devices, mainly smartphones, are nearly ubiquitous among Japanese university students. For many of them it is their only computing device, and they are proficient in using it for their Japanese communication needs. One of the key elements in using a mobile device in Japanese is predictive text, an input technology that suggests words and phrases the user may wish to use. This study looked at students' awareness of the predictive text and other features that they can use when writing in English on their mobile devices.

**Keywords:** awareness, input, mobile devices, predictive text, spell checker

## Introduction

According to a Pew Research Center report (Poushter 2016) on smartphone ownership and internet usage for 2015, 69% of Japanese adults report using the internet or having a smartphone, and 97% of the 18 to 34 age group say they use the internet or have a smartphone. In a survey of 228 first-year students at Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine in April 2017, 98% said that they have a smartphone (unpublished English course survey).

For many in the computer-assisted language learning community, mobile devices have become the “device” that has the most promise going forward. (Simon and Fell 2012;

Bachore 2015 ) The problem is that many instructors make the assumption that our “digital native” (Prensky 2001) students really know how to exploit the power of the devices that they carry in their pockets and bags.

There was one research question:

1. Do students know how to use their devices for writing in English?

## Methods

A short eight-question survey in English created in the Moodle Feedback module was given to 122 first-year

students in the early part of the semester in May to gauge students' awareness and usage of the predictive text and the spell checker features on their smartphones when writing in English. They had had four short writing assignments before they took the survey where they were free to use their mobile device or not. Of the 122 students, 104 took the survey. Of the 104 students, only two answered that they did not have a smartphone, and so they did not complete the remaining questions.

The students were asked about the following points.

- Which smartphone operating system (OS) they used?
- Which of the input settings they had selected on their

iPhone/Android device (Figs. 1 and 2)?

- Whether they used their devices for doing English writing assignments? Those who answered "yes" were asked if they used the predictive text and the spell checker features of their phones.

## Results and Discussion

The settings that the students were asked about are the default settings for both iPhone (Fig. 1) and Android (Fig 2). It appears that the Android users were more likely to change

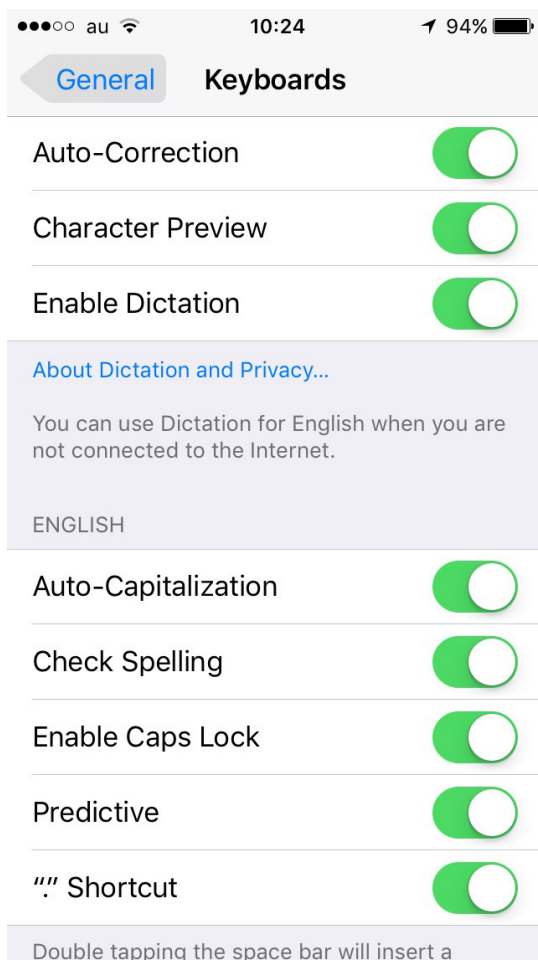


Fig. 1 iPhone Settings

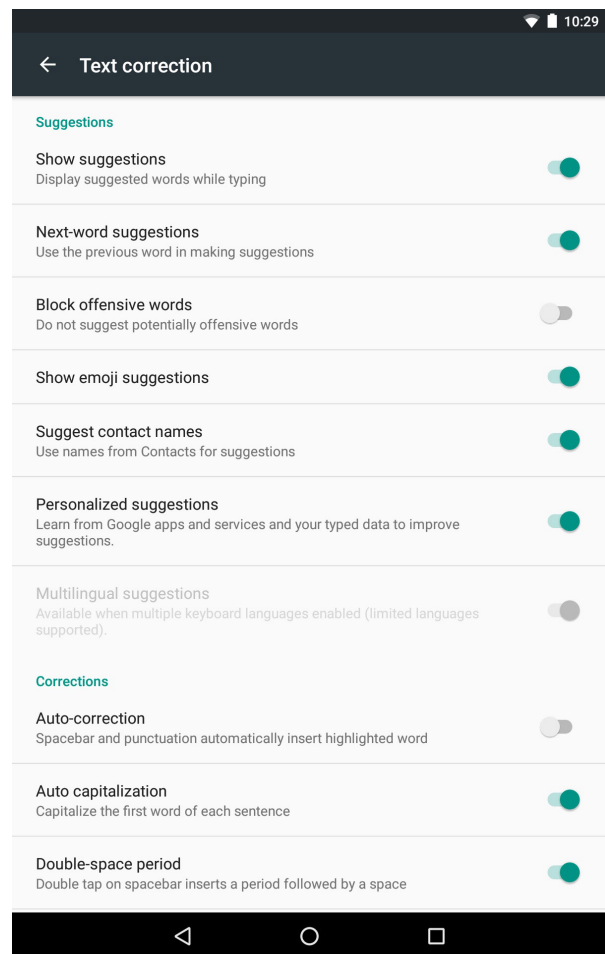


Fig. 2 Android Settings

the default settings than the iPhone users (Figs. 3 & 4). A follow up question should have been asked as to why they turned off some of these features.

The majority of students have at least tried to use their devices for doing the course writing assignments (Fig. 5), but a large number had never attempted it. A follow up question to find the reasons for using or not using their devices for the

writing assignments should have been asked.

The use of predictive text in English was a little surprising. I felt the number was going to be lower even though it is a feature that is commonly used in Japanese (Fig. 6). That being said, 32% found it difficult to use or did not know it was available, and there was a large number who were not aware of the spell checker feature (Fig. 7).

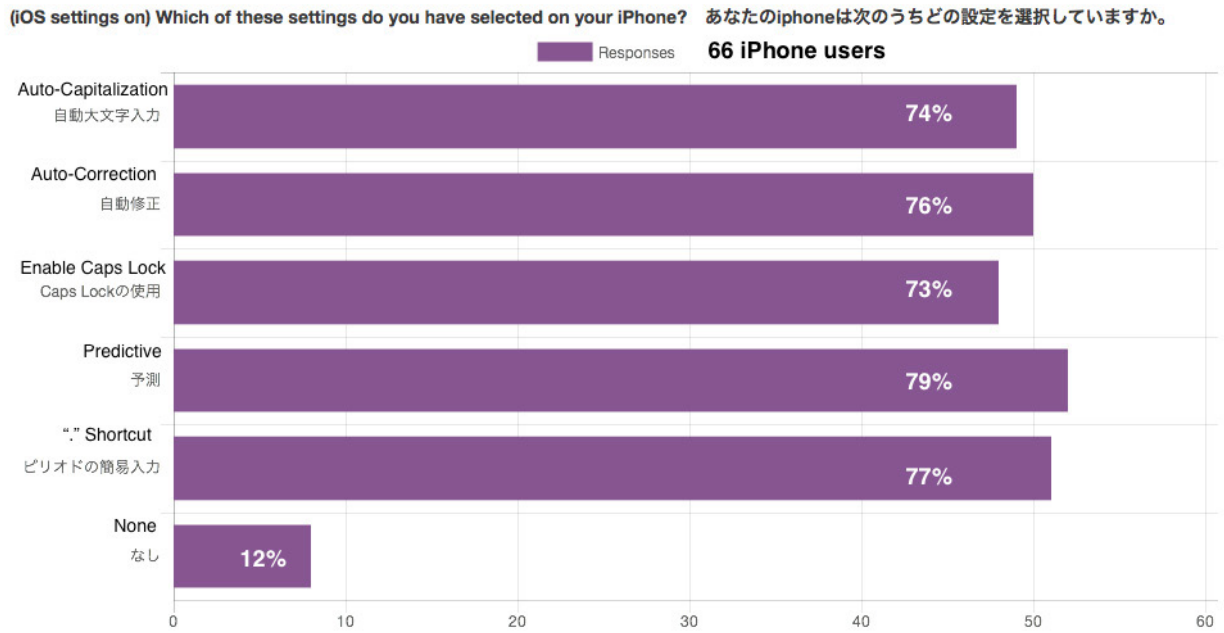


Fig. 3 iPhone

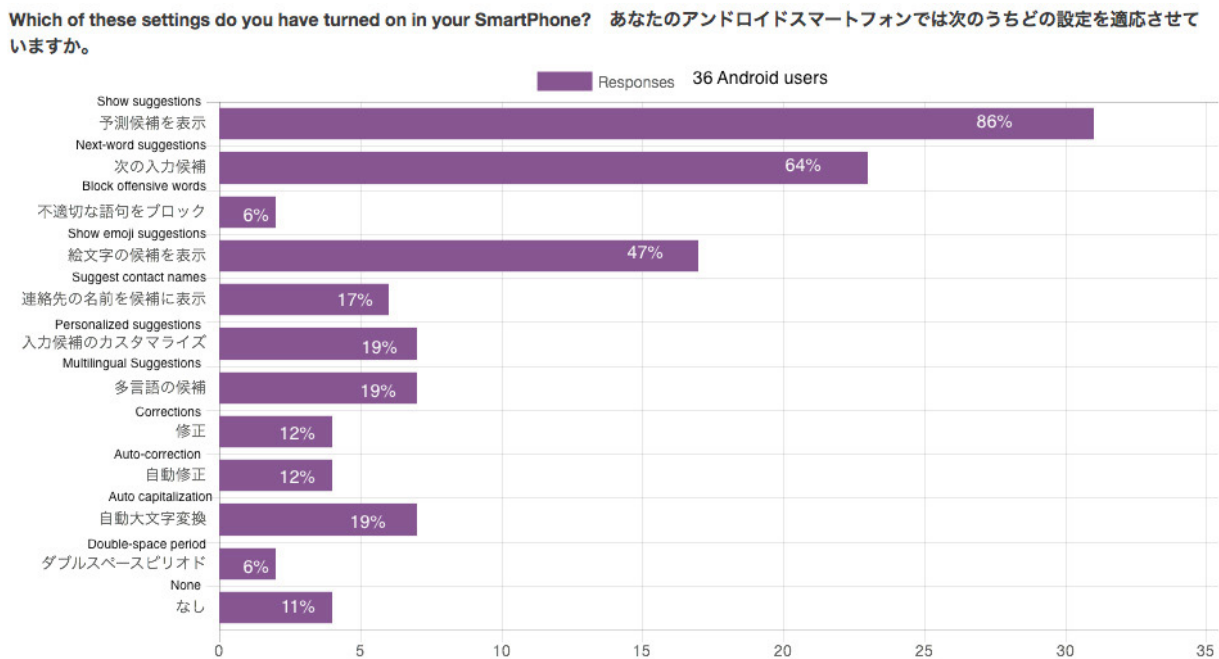


Fig. 4 Android Users

(Homework) Do you do your English homework writing assignments on your smartphone? 英語のライティングの提出課題をスマートフォンでやっていますか。

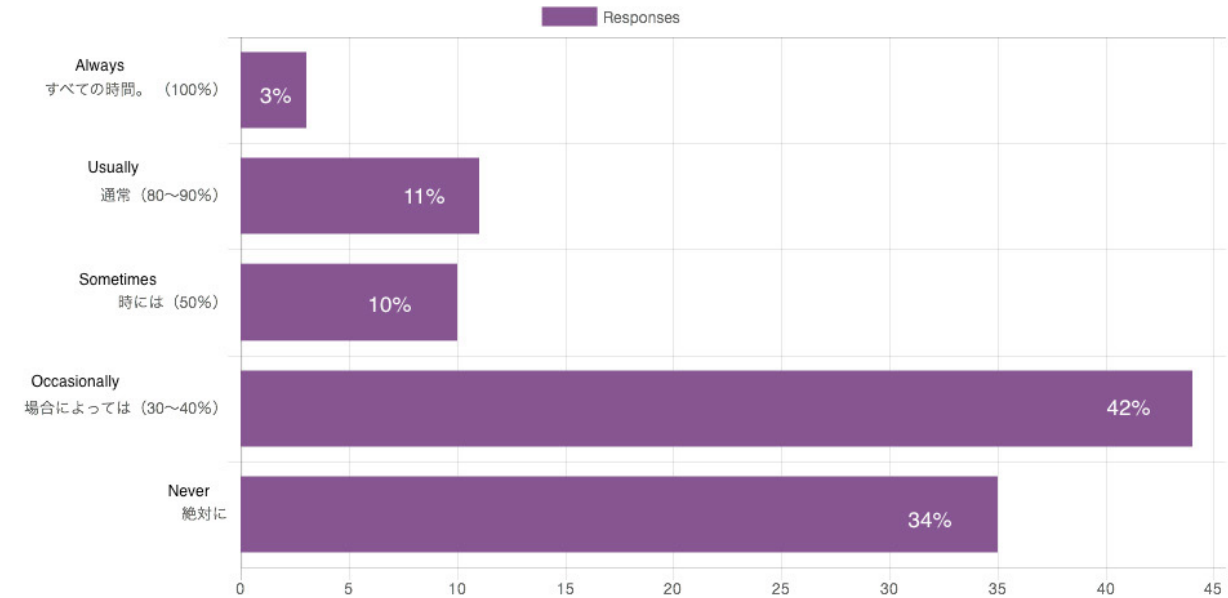


Fig. 5 Number of Students using their mobile device for homework

(Predictive) Do you use the predictive (予測) text feature like the ones in the images above when using English? あなたはスマートフォンで英語を打つときに予測キーを利用しますか。

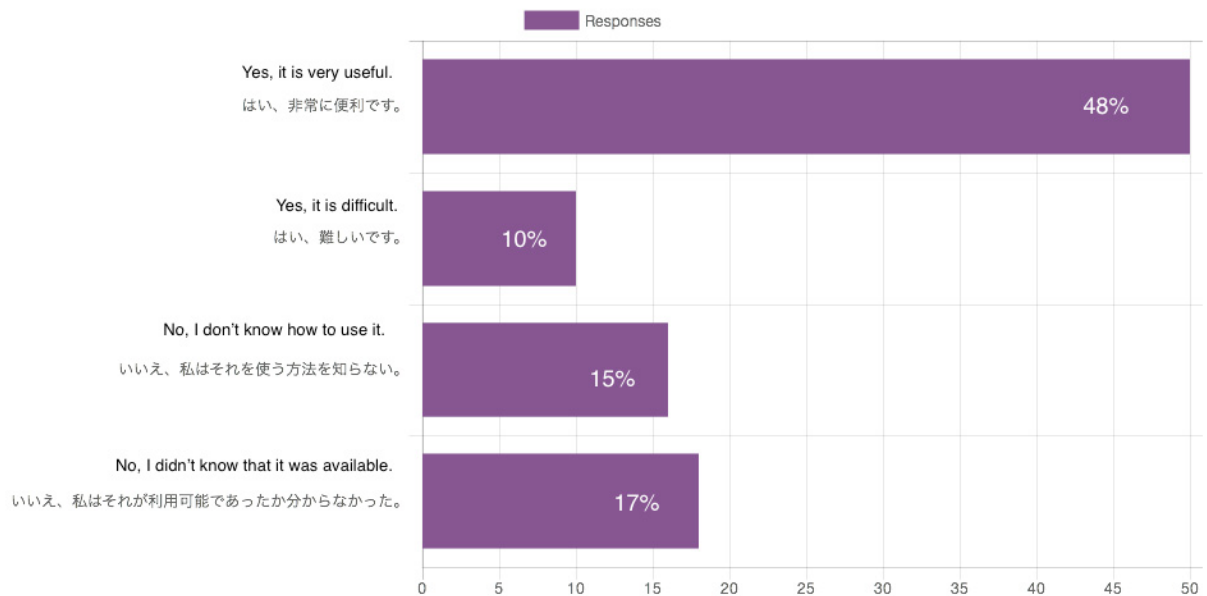


Fig. 6 Number of students using the predictive text feature.

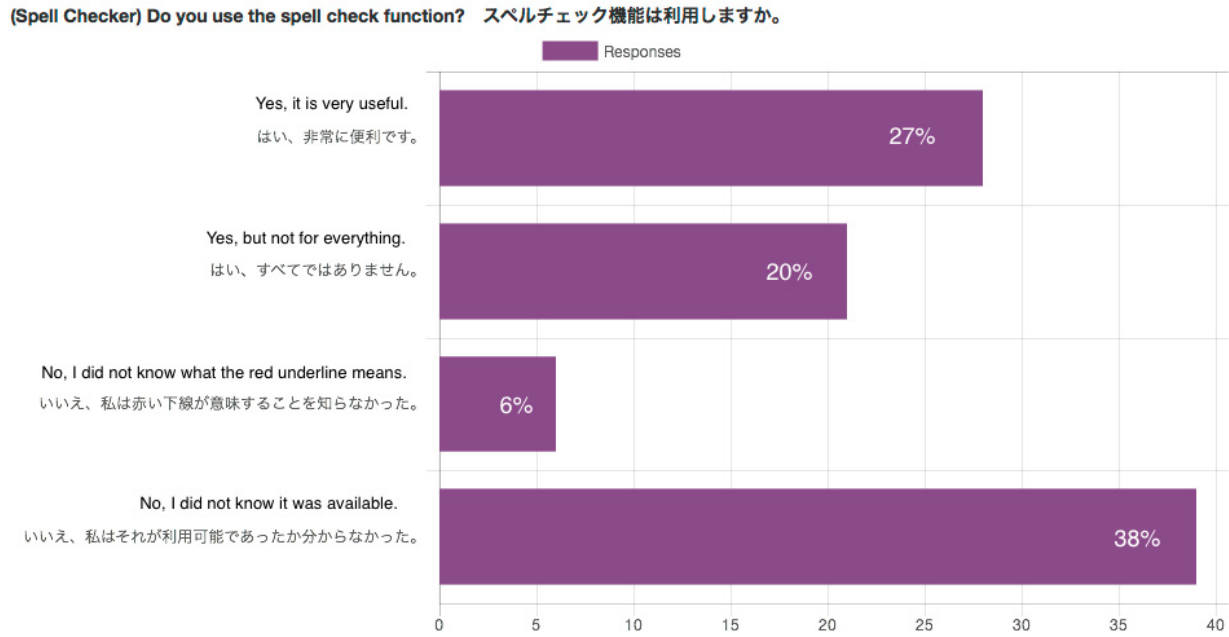


Fig. 7 Number of students using the spell check function.

## Conclusion

Mobile devices have become the computing device of choice for most Japanese university students. Even though they use the devices extensively throughout the day, they are not familiar with how to use the features of their devices that will speed up and improve their English writing. This means that instructors need to decide how much class time they want spend in training the students in how to utilize these features if they want their students to get the most out of their mobile devices.

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