

Japanese Language Pronunciation Teaching Strategy

Franky R. Najoan
Universitas Negeri Manado
frankynajoan@unima.ac.id

Yasuhiko Sukegawa
Tokyo International University
ysukega@tiu.ac.jp

Abstract

Indonesian learners of Japanese face several problems in acquiring Japanese language. The chances for Indonesians to come and live in Japan as technical intern trainee, specific skill visa worker, caregiver, and other internship are increasing and they need to communicate with the Japanese. Due to the interference from the Indonesian language, some consonants and prosodic features are realized incorrectly resulting communication hindrances. Not only problems with learners related to pronunciation learning, but also there are problems with teachers related to pronunciation instruction. Najoan and Sukegawa published a book on Japanese phonetics titled “Fonetik Bahasa Jepang” in 2023. At this opportunity, the authors are planning to point out typical pronunciation errors and present correction and training techniques.

Keywords: *Indonesian learners of Japanese, pronunciation, Fonetik Bahasa Jepang, training technique*

要旨

インドネシア人日本語学習者には発音学習の面で重要な問題がある。技能実習、特定技能、介護士、インターンシップ等の訪日機会が増え、音声コミュニケーションの必要性は高まっている。インドネシア語の影響で日本語の子音や韻律が不正確になり、コミュニケーションの妨げになる場合が多いが、その指導は十分に行われていない。学習者側の問題ばかりでなく、教師側にも指導に関わる問題がある。Najoan と Sukegawa は 2023 年に” Fonetik Bahasa Jepang” を出版した。今回の発表では、その出版物を元にインドネシア人日本語学習者に多く見られる発音上の問題点を指摘し、その練習法を紹介したい。

キーワード: インドネシア人学習者、発音、発音指導ストラテジー

1. Introduction

Japanese language education in Indonesia is now becoming more popular and the number of learners is growing. The increase is not only in the number of learners, but also in the number of teachers and institutions that teach Japanese (Japan Foundation, 2021). In the second half of the 20th century, Japanese language education was mostly taught as a subject centered on college and high school students, but with the increasing number of technical interns (*ginou jisshuusei*) and skilled foreign workers (*tokutei ginou*), more and more young

Indonesians are migrating to Japan, working in various industries. In addition, especially in the fields of nursing (*caregiver*) and student/college student internships, more and more elderly care facilities and hotels are attempting to employ Indonesians because of their good and serious personalities, so that the future of Japanese language learning in Indonesia is increasing, and thus mastery of Japanese is essential not only for students but also for those who will come to Japan as workers. Because they will be working in Japan, oral communication with Japanese is a very important skill. However, in Japanese language education in Indonesia today, although listening lessons in preparation for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) have been carried out, it seems that pronunciation learning still receives less attention. It is important to teach and practice pronunciation adequately during the introductory period of learning Hiragana. Otherwise, the relationship between pronunciation and transcription will be inaccurate, and will cause problems later on. In this presentation, we would like to summarize and introduce pronunciation problems that often occur in Japanese language learners in Indonesia. Some suggestions will also be given on how and strategies to teach pronunciation efficiently and effectively.

2. Problems

First, one of the main problems is the lack of teaching materials for pronunciation learning. In large bookstores, there are many teaching materials on conversation, grammar, and Kanji. Although some teaching materials use Hiragana and Kanji, most of the novice teaching materials are written in *Romaji* (Roman script). In the *Romaji* text, there is are inaccurate romanizations, which can cause inaccurate Japanese pronunciation. Many learners and teachers mistakenly believe that Japanese can be easily written in *Romaji*. However, this is not the case. For example, the Indonesian spelling: “Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka”, which is influenced by the English Roman alphabet spelling custom, does not accurately represent the actual pronunciation of 「とうきょう」 /tookyoo/ 「きょうと」 /kyooto/, and 「おおさか」 /oosaka/. The differences in vowel length are completely ignored. In addition to the long sound issue, there are actually many more detailed rules regarding other Japanese pronunciations that Indonesians cannot pronounce if they rely on *Romaji*. Not only that, incorrect learning will cause learners to master the wrong pronunciation and have an impact on their output, both spoken and written.

The next problem is teachers’ ability. The tendency of Indonesian Japanese language teachers in teaching Japanese with pronunciation that is heavily influenced by their mother tongue because they have never received guidance from native Japanese speakers or have never lived in Japan. In addition, although some teaching materials include CDs and audio sources available on the Internet, most teachers do not use them, and prefer to focus their learning on vocabulary tests, grammar rule tests, and translations.

Large universities throughout Indonesia ~~that~~ provide Japanese language education, each department/study program ~~has~~ having a large number of Japanese language teachers. Although some of them have studied in Japan and speak Japanese with accurate pronunciation, however, the number of teachers who do not master pronunciation is much greater. If another teacher who does not master pronunciation teaches the same class using inaccurate pronunciation, then the students will be influenced by the inaccurate pronunciation of such a teacher, and as a result, when they graduate, they will be more proficient in inaccurate Japanese pronunciation. This is very unfortunate.

Inaccurate pronunciation due to the influence of the mother tongue is a natural problem that occurs not only in Japanese language learners in Indonesia, but also in all foreign

language learners. However, inaccurate pronunciation can be detrimental to learners, because they cannot convey information well, seem childish, or sound like they pronounce it rudely.

Here are some examples of cases. Indonesian does not have voiced alveolar affricate sounds like in the series of sounds /za, zi, zu, ze, zo/, so in many cases these sounds are realized in such a way that they sound like [sa] or [dʒa] to the ears of Japanese people. As a result, Indonesian Japanese language learners have unique pronunciation characteristics, which may be their weakness.

In addition, Indonesian does not differentiate meaning based on the stress of the tone (accent) in the word, so the difference between the word *hashi* (箸) ‘chopsticks’ with high and low tones (HL), and *hashi* (橋) ‘bridge’ with low and high tones (LH), becomes confusing, and the pronunciation of both words by Indonesians sounds unnatural to Japanese people. On the one hand, there are so many accent patterns that must be memorized that it becomes a burden for learners.

To overcome problems like the above, there needs to be a learning strategy that makes the acquisition process easier.

3. Previous Study

Sukegawa (1993) investigated the characteristics of Japanese pronunciation among learners from all over the world. This is the first report in the history of Japanese language education research, which describes deviant pronunciation forms. Among them, there are many characteristics (or let us call them problems) of Japanese pronunciation by Indonesian learners. There are a lot of mixings of similar pronunciations, and so on. Najoan (2012, 2013) is a multifaceted study of the perception and production of prosody among Japanese learners in Indonesia. This thesis summarizes the important parts of the pronunciation of segmental and suprasegmental sounds of Japanese. Najoan (2018) found that the pronunciation patterns of Japanese by Indonesian learners are very varied. This presentation is a summary of the report on the results of the research and learning practices that have been carried out so far. In 2023, Najoan and Sukegawa completed and published the first Japanese phonetics textbook in Indonesia entitled "Phonetics of the Japanese Language" (Najoan & Sukegawa, 2023). In this presentation, we will introduce some parts of the book's contents.

4. Pronunciation Learning Strategy

When teaching in real situations, the most important thing is “how to teach pronunciation”. Japanese pronunciation involves complex rules and phonetic change phenomena that cannot be expressed in written language. However, if all these detailed rules are taught, learners’ motivation will decrease and they will be very likely to fail. These rules should be simplified, and novice learners should be taught what they need at the beginner level, intermediate learners should be taught what they need at the intermediate level, and advanced learners should be taught the details that will help them become closer to native Japanese speakers. Curriculum and syllabus need to be designed to teach these things.

Najoan (2013) has simplified these rules and applied a student-centered learning method, namely the peer feedback technique, so that learners can find their own way of learning and mastering pronunciation easily.

Japanese language teachers who teach pronunciation do not have to be native speakers. They also do not need to speak Japanese with perfect pronunciation. In this day and age, the Internet is so easy to use. There is one of the most useful Japanese language

textbooks available on the Internet, namely a book entitled "Irodori", created by the Japan Foundation (2020). This book is released free of charge for anyone to use and has the Indonesian language version. The most important thing is that learners can hear the pronunciation of new vocabulary repeatedly with the touch of a button. In other words, as long as there is Wi-Fi or an Internet network and electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, or PCs, teachers can let the students listen to the natural pronunciation of native speakers to learners in a classroom in a city on any island. By using teaching materials like this, novice learners can acquire the basics of accurate pronunciation. At intermediate and upper levels, learners can listen to the natural speech sounds of native speakers from *anime* and Japanese films on video sites. However, hearing the audio alone is certainly not enough. Teachers must guide learners on things to pay attention to—such as the differences in similar sounds between Indonesian and Japanese, the position of word accents, and so on. By listening to audio like the one in the "Irodori" book, learners are likely to be able to master accurate pronunciation. However, since the process of language acquisition differs from person to person, some people are good at pronunciation while others are not, so it cannot be expected that all learners will improve their pronunciation by using this strategy. However, with a little effort from the teacher, by letting the students listen to more correct Japanese pronunciation such as the teaching material "Irodori", and with simpler explanation guidance and supported by student-centered learning methods and techniques will provide great meaning for pronunciation learning.

5. Recommendation

Japanese language education in Japanese language departments and training centers for skilled workers (*tokutei ginou*) and technical interns (*ginou jisshuusei*) is often taught in a team of teachers (*team teching*). In this case, it is important that all teachers in the team have access to the same audio resources and use them in every lesson. A bad practice is that some teachers try to use the available resources, while others only teach with their own inaccurate pronunciation. Success in learning a foreign language depends on how much time students spend after class to review the lessons and practice independently. The role of the teacher is as a facilitator. What helps the teachers is to point out which sounds are difficult for Indonesian students and instruct them on the points to use resources such as "Irodori", and regarding the results whether students can master them or not, it depends on each student's efforts. In today's digital era, where the Internet is widespread and students have electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, and PCs, teachers must realize that the role of a teacher is as a facilitator.

6. Conclusion

As mentioned in the beginning, learning pronunciation is important. This is becoming increasingly important as the number of Indonesians living and working in Japan increases. One important suggestion for learning pronunciation is to utilize learning resources that provide audio lessons, both available physically and on the Internet. In particular, it is highly recommended to use applications that allow students to hear the natural pronunciation of words and sentences through their devices, and to make learners aware that practicing repeatedly is very important and can greatly help them master pronunciation well.

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