



## Japanese Accent Pronunciation Error by Japanese Learners in Elementary and Intermediate Level

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### ABSTRACT

This research discusses errors in the pronunciation of Japanese accents by Japanese learners. This study aims to determine the forms and causes of accents pronunciation errors in Japanese learners as well as Japanese learners' comprehension of Japanese accent. The data used are speech data (word and sentence) of 18 people who are students of Japanese literature at a private university in Jakarta, in their 3rd and 4th years (hereafter written as respondents). As comparison data, this research uses Japanese native speaker data from Tokyo and electronic speech data from OJAD (Online Japanese Accent Dictionary). This research used a qualitative research method. Praat application also used to get a detailed visual description of Japanese speech from respondents. The results of this research found a form of error in the form of accent changes that do not match the speech data per word and sentence. The cause of accent errors was the lack of attention to the accent and the lack of learning about accents in the respondent's learning environment. It was also found that 80% of respondents had minimal understanding of Japanese accents.

### KEYWORDS

Accent; Japanese Learning; Praat; Pronunciation.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the process of learning Japanese, accent is an important aspect of fulfilling Japanese speaking skills. When speaking Japanese, speakers must give attention to the accent, intonation, length of pronunciation, or pronunciation of multiple consonants (Dahidi & Sudjianto, 2004; Setiawan & Artadi, 2018).

Tjandra (2004) described that phonetic data shows that the Japanese accent type is a tonal accent. There are only two tones used, namely high

notes and low notes. Tonal accents can serve as a differentiator of meaning.

According to Yoshida (1997), based on research on the needs of Japanese learners while studying Japanese, several facts are known, namely, regarding the desire to "speak with natural pronunciation and intonation" which ranks top as something that wants to be studied and trained more thoroughly. On the other hand, the answer that "I have learned about the above matters" is at the lowest rank.

The condition of Japanese language education in Indonesia is still at the stage of increasing the

passing rate on the Japanese language proficiency test resulting in minor attention to learning accents or intonations in Japanese to improve communication skills using Japanese.

To see that the passing rate is still low, it is reasonable that grammar is the most concerning subject by the learners. The condition of Japanese language education in Indonesia is still at the state of increasing the passing rate on the Japanese language proficiency test so that there is minor attention to learning accents/intonations in Japanese to improve the ability to communicate using Japanese.





## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Japanese Accent

According to Tjandra (2004), phonetic data indicates that the Japanese accent type is a pitch-accent. There are only two tones used, namely high notes and low notes (Ikeda, 2000). Pitch-accents can distinguish the meanings between similarly pronounced words (Kumi, 2020).

Table 1 below show some example of Japanese language accent.

Table 1: Example of Japanese language accent.

Words	Romaji	Accent	Meaning
雨	/ame/		Rain
飴	/ame/		Candy
菓子屋	/kashiya/		Confectionary
貸家	/kashiya/		Rental house

Tsujimura (2013), stated that languages with pitch-accent are similar to tonal languages, each *mora* in a word is associated with a certain tone, such as high tone, low tone, and decreased tone. *Mora* is the smallest speech unit that contains one high or low tone of a tonal accent. In Bahasa, the separation of words based on sound is called syllables, but in Japanese, the separation of words based on sound is called *mora*. Table 2 is an example of the difference between syllable and *mora*.

Table 2: Example of the difference between syllable and *mora*.

a	Bahasa	<i>makan</i>	ma · kan (2 syllables)
b	Japanese	<i>mikan</i>	mi · ka · n (3 <i>mora</i> )

Widjaja (2005), stated that Tokyo dialect is used as a representation in the Japanese dialect because Tokyo dialect is considered a standard Japanese dialect and therefore Tokyo accent is also considered a standard accent. This is because Tokyo is the centre of Japanese culture and Tokyo accent is the most widespread accent throughout Japan.

According to Kindaichi (1992), one thing to watch out for in any Tokyo accent pattern is the importance of a place where the notes are high and drop to low notes. Where the drop started is very important. If we can be careful in pronouncing it then everything else can be ignored. The drop in the tone is said to be a *taki* rather than an accent, which translates to waterfall.














Below are pitch-accent characteristics that areas in Tokyo have:

- There are only 2 tones, which is high and low tones.
- Each *mora* only has one tone. There are no *mora* consists of two tones.
- Initial and second *mora* had to be different in tone.
- There is no low tone between high tones.
- There are no accents consists of only low tones.

Based on Japanese Accent Dictionary by NHK (1998), in Tokyo accent, the accent pattern can be determined by the formula of  $n + 1 =$  the number of accent patterns, where  $n$  is the number of *mora* in a word. Based on this formula, noticeably that one *mora* has two patterns, two *mora* has three patterns, and so on. In one *mora* accent pattern, the pattern can be seen if the *mora* is followed by a particle.

Japanese accent patterns are as seen in Table 3 as follows.

Table 3: Japanese accent patterns.

Mora		1 Mora	2 Mora	3 Mora	4 Mora
<i>Heibangata</i>		葉が /ha ga/ leaf 	うしが /u shi ga/ cow 	きまえが /ki ma e ga/ generosity 	スタジオが /su ta ji o ga/ studio 
<i>Kifuku</i>	<i>Odakakata</i>		うまが/u ma ga/ horse 	おとこが /o to ko ga/ man 	いもうとが /i mo u to ga/ sister 
	<i>Nakadaka</i>			いとこが /i to ko ga/ cousin 	いねむりが /i ne mu ri ga/ dozing 
<i>Atamadaka</i>		歯が /ha ga/ teeth 	かばが /ka ba ga/ birch 	いのちが /i no chi ga/ life 	けんぼうが /ke n bo u ga/ fencing 

### Japanese Accent in Phrase

According to Takemura (2008), accents are found at the high or low tone of a word. If there are two or more words, *taki* position can be changed. Here are the rules for changing position of *taki* at the phrase level and its examples.

- If the word at the front of the phrase has a *Heiban* pattern, the next word tends to carry on with a high note.
  - さくらが+さいた→さくらがさいた  
/sa<sup>h</sup>kuraga/ + /sa<sup>h</sup>ita/ → /sa<sup>h</sup>kuragasaita
  - とりが+ないた→とりがないた  
/to<sup>h</sup>riga/ + /na<sup>h</sup>ita/ → /to<sup>h</sup>riganaita/
- If the word at the front has a *Kifuku* pattern, the initial high note of the next

word tends to disappear and become a low note.

- はなが+さいた→はながさいた  
/hana<sup>h</sup>ga/ + /sa<sup>h</sup>ita/ → /hana<sup>l</sup>gasaita/
- うぐいすが+ないた→うぐいすがないた  
/ugu<sup>h</sup>isuga/ + /na<sup>h</sup>ita/ → /ugu<sup>l</sup>suganaita/
- たべて+みたい→たべてみたい  
/ta<sup>h</sup>bete/ + /mi<sup>h</sup>tai/ → /ta<sup>l</sup>betemitai/

### Previous Research on Japanese Accent Pronunciation Errors

There are relevant studies related to this study such as Widjaja (2005), Rismayanti, Morita, and Kazuhide (2015), and Malayu (2016).

Rismayanti, Morita, and Kazuhide (2015) studied on characteristics of Japanese accent by Indonesian, and its teaching method. This study assumes that Indonesian pronunciation and accent vary depending on the origin region of the speaker, and this has a significant influence on Indonesians in speaking Japanese. The result of this study found that studying Japanese accent is difficult for Indonesian's Japanese learners, even for learners at an advanced level. The percentage of respondents who can pronounce words in the correct accent is relatively low.

Malayu (2016) studied Accent Pattern and Tone Flow in Japanese by Japanese language learner's in Medan. The result of this study also found that Japanese language learner in Medan (a city in Indonesia), most of the respondents were also cannot pronounce Japanese words' in the correct accent pattern.

Studies mentioned before focused on accent patterns in word-level. This research intends to study on Japanese learner's accent patterns in sentence-level using accent phrase theory by Takemura (2008). Furthermore, this research also aims to determine the cause of Japanese language accent pattern mispronunciation by its learners.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research Objects and Data Collection Method

In this study, an error analysis was conducted on the pronunciation of Japanese accents from 3rd and 4th-year students of Japanese Literature at a private university in Jakarta who had completed the elementary and intermediate level of the Japanese language learning process. The accent that was analyzed is in the form of word and sentence.

The data in this study were obtained from records of text-reading and interviews with respondents, which are students of Japanese literature at a private university in Jakarta in semesters 6th, 8th, and 10th. Respondents who participated in this research were 18 respondents who were randomly selected using simple random sampling technique.

The reading text instrument for tapping records consists of nine words and sentences which are divided into five parts.

1. The first part consists of four words and sentences in the form of the *Heibangata* accent pattern.
2. The second part consists of two words and a sentence in the form of the *Atamadakagata* accent pattern.
3. The third part consists of two words and sentences in the form of a *Nakadakagata* accent pattern.
4. The fourth part consists of one word and sentence in the form of an *Odakagata* accent pattern.

Along with tapping respondents' text-reading records, interviews were also conducted with respondents. This interview aims to determine the causes of errors.

As reference data, tapping records were also conducted with a native Japanese speaker and uses of OJAD (Online Japanese Accent Dictionary). OJAD is an online Japanese accent dictionary for Japanese learners and teachers. OJAD has a feature called *Suzuki-kun* in which with this feature we can listen and visualize the accent patterns of certain words or sentences in Japanese.

### Analysis Method

In this research, an application called Praat is used to analyzes the mistakes made by Japanese learners in pronouncing Japanese accents (Jin, 2019). Praat is a software developed by Paul Boersma and David Weenink used for phonetic research. By using Praat, it is possible to match the tone of the recorded data for Japanese native speakers and learners. The data analyzed were interpreted by looking at the pitch pattern that had been described on the separation of each *mora* in the words or sentences displayed by Praat. Figure 1 and 2 are the examples of the data shown from Praat.

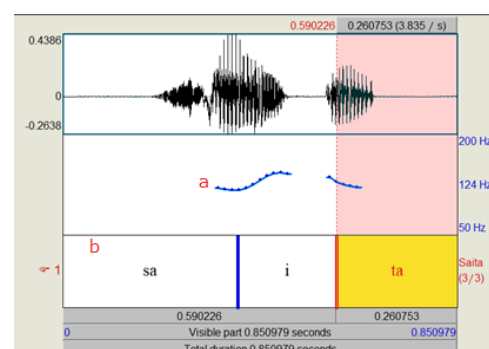


Figure 1: Examples of pitch-pattern analysis interface on Praat.

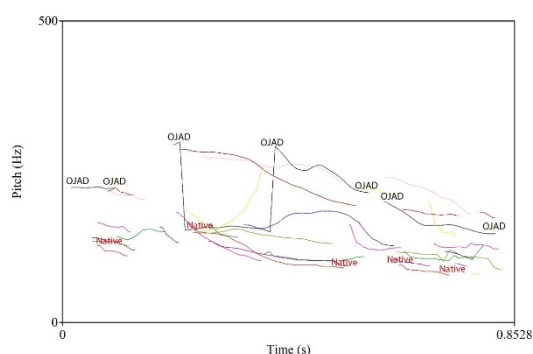


Figure 2: Examples of reference and respondents pitch-pattern comparison data.

After recording the respondents, accent accuracy grade was checked and calculated each of the 18 respondents with reference data from native Japanese speakers and OJAD. The calculation of accuracy grade uses the following formula:

$$\text{Score} = \frac{\sum \text{Accurate accent score}}{\sum \text{Total accurate score}(9)} \times 100$$

After the score is calculated, passing rate graph of the respondent's score was made with the following score classifications.

- A = 100-85 (Very Good)
- B = 84-75 (Good)
- C = 74-60 (Enough)
- D = 59-50 (Not Good)
- E = 49-0 (Bad)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Records Analysis Results

Table 4 and 5 are the results of record analysis of the respondent Japanese accents pronunciation.

Table 4: Respondent's Japanese words accent scores.

Code (R = Respondents)	Accuracy (Words)	Score (Words)
R1	5	56
R2	7	78
R3	5	56
R4	1	11
R5	2	22
R6	4	44
R7	6	67
R8	4	44
R9	4	44
R10	7	78
R11	5	56
R12	3	33
R13	6	67
R14	5	56
R15	2	22
R16	7	78
R17	2	22
R18	4	44
<b>Average</b>	<b>48.7</b>	
<b>Highest Score</b>	<b>78</b>	
<b>Lowest Score</b>	<b>11</b>	

Table 5: Respondent's Japanese sentences accent scores.

Code (R = Respondents)	Accuracy (Sentences)	Score (Sentences)
R1	6	67
R2	4	44
R3	3	33
R4	4	44
R5	4	44
R6	6	67
R7	5	56
R8	5	56
R9	4	44
R10	4	44
R11	5	56
R12	4	44
R13	5	56
R14	5	56
R15	4	44
R16	6	67
R17	5	56
R18	5	56
<b>Average</b>	<b>51.8</b>	
<b>Highest Score</b>	<b>67</b>	
<b>Lowest Score</b>	<b>33</b>	

From Table 4 and 5, it can be seen that the average score of 18 respondents in the word pronunciation section is 48.7, with the highest score 78 and the lowest grade 11. In the sentence pronunciation section, the average score of 18 respondents is 51.8 with the highest score 67 and the lowest score 33. The average value of the respondents in pronouncing words and sentences can be seen as having a relatively low score.

Based on Table 4 and 5, the passing rate graph of the respondent's score was made with the following score classifications, as shown in Figure 3 and 4.

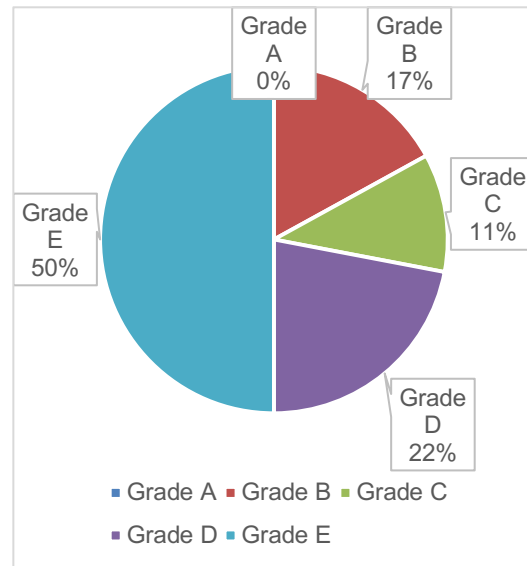


Figure 3: Respondents' score graph on Japanese accents words pronunciation error.

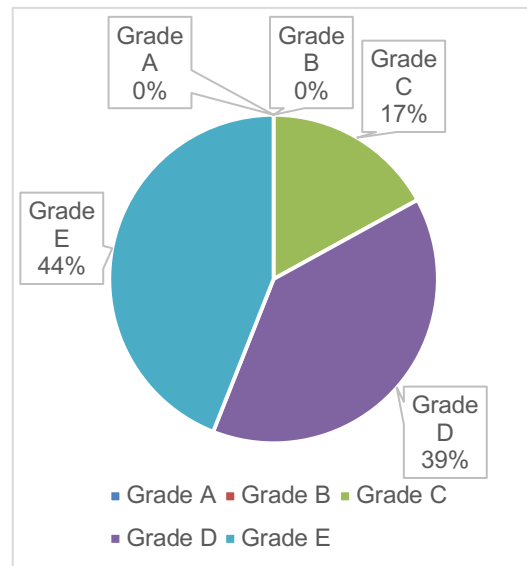


Figure 4: Respondents' score graph on Japanese accents sentences pronunciation error.

In Figure 4, if the "C" score is the passing standard, then 72% of the respondents did not pass the word accent pronunciation section. In Figure 4, if the "C" score is the passing standard, then 83% of the respondents did not pass sentence accent pronunciation. These findings agree with Malayu (2015) and Rismayanti, Morita, and Kazuhide (2015)'s research. Japanese learners in Indonesia have difficulty in pronouncing the Japanese language with the correct accent pattern.

From the analysis, it was found that the respondents tend to make several mistakes in their pronunciation of Japanese accents in pronouncing words with a *Heibangata* pattern, respondents tend to make mistakes by pronouncing the word with the *Atamadaka* pattern; in pronouncing sentences with *Heibangata* pattern, respondents tend to pronounce the first words in the sentence with *Atamadaka* pattern; in pronouncing words with the *Atamadaka* pattern, respondents tend to make mistakes by pronouncing the word with the *Heibangata* pattern; in pronouncing sentences with the *Atamadaka* pattern, respondents tend to make mistakes by pronouncing the word in the sentence with *Heibangata* or *Odakagata* patterns; in the pronunciation of words in the *Nakadakagata* pattern, respondents tend to make mistakes by pronouncing the word in the *Heibangata* or *Atamadakagata* pattern; in the pronunciation of sentences with *Nakadakagata* pattern, respondents tend to make mistakes by pronouncing the words in the sentence with *Atamadakagata* pattern; in pronouncing words with the *Odakagata* pattern, respondents tend to make mistakes by pronouncing the word with the *Atamadakagata* pattern, and in pronouncing sentences in the *Odakagata* pattern, respondents tend to make mistakes by pronouncing the words in the sentence with the *Heibangata* pattern.

The following Table 6 and 7 are the summary of respondents' error in Japanese accents pronunciation.

Table 6: Summary of respondent Japanese accent words error.

Correct	Mistake
<i>Heiban</i>	<i>Atamadaka</i>
<i>Atamadaka</i>	<i>Heiban</i>
<i>Nakadaka</i>	<i>Heiban/Atama</i>
<i>Odaka</i>	<i>Atamadaka</i>

Table 7: Summary of respondent Japanese accent words error.

Correct	Mistake
<i>Heiban</i>	<i>Atamadaka</i>
<i>Atamadaka</i>	<i>Heiban/Odaka</i>
<i>Nakadaka</i>	<i>Atamadaka</i>
<i>Odaka</i>	<i>Atamadaka</i>

## Interview Results

Interviews with respondents were conducted to determine the respondent's background, understanding, and opinion of respondents regarding Japanese accents. Questions in the interview consisted of five questions, which is regarding respondent's living environment, respondent's local language, respondent's Japanese language ability based on their Japanese Language Proficiency Test certificate and length of studying Japanese, the difficulty in pronouncing the text during recording related to tone or accent and respondent's opinion about Japanese accent. Below are the results of interviews with respondents.

### *Living environment and spoken local language*

The respondents generally lived in the area around Jabodetabek. 2 respondents have lived in Japan for one year, R2 and R8 in the Kansai area. Then, 1 respondent who has lived in Japan for 3 months, which is R7. 3 respondents were in Japan, R3 in Kansai, R11 in Hachioji, and R16 in Hiroshima.

2 respondents speak Javanese language, which are R3 and R13. Then, 4 respondents could speak local Sundanese language, which are R5, R14, R15, and R18. Then, R1 can speak local Betawi language and R9 can speak local Palembang language.

### *Respondent's Japanese language ability based on their Japanese Language Proficiency Test and length of time studying Japanese*

In terms of length of studying Japanese, there were 4 respondents with 3 years of study, R12-R15. 2 respondents with 4 years of study, R1 and R10, and the other 12 respondents have a length of learning Japanese over 4 years.

3 respondents already have JLPT N2 which is R2, R8, and R11. Then, 9 respondents have JLPT N3, 2 respondents who have JLPT N4, namely, R5 and R12. Then, R13 has JLPT N5 and 3 respondents do not have JLPT certificates which are R6, R9, and R15.

### ***Difficulty pronouncing text instrument at the time of recording regarding tone or accent***

9 respondents did not find it difficult to pronounce accent tones when reading text, which are R1, R2, R5, R7, R9, R10, R11, R12, and R17. The others 9 respondents found it difficult to pronounce the accent tone when reading the text.

### ***Respondent's opinions regarding Japanese accent***

13 respondents think that learning Japanese accents is important. Then, 5 respondents thought that learning Japanese accents was important under certain conditions. According to R1, learning about Japanese accents is not critical if you only want to learn Japanese (grammatically). According to R2, learning about Japanese accents is essential if needed, for example in translation works according to respondents, accent learning is needed because when translating, accent can help to fit translation into the right context. According to R11, the urgency to learn Japanese accents is needed if you are in an environment that uses Japanese fully. This is because if the accent is pronounced incorrectly, then there is a possibility that the intended words/sentences are not well delivered, and this also gives a good impression, especially for native Japanese speakers. According to R13 and R16, for Japanese language learners who are just learning Japanese, the accent is not crucial because the first thing that essential in learning Japanese is the language itself (grammatically) or vocabulary first. Accent is essential to learn at an intermediate level so that you can have a better understanding when talking to Japanese speakers.

In their learning environment, 12 respondents felt that their learning environment is lacking in Japanese accent learning. 2 respondents felt that there was no Japanese accent learning in their learning environment. 4 respondents felt that learning about accents in their learning environment was enough. For R13, the respondent is taking a course on accents in the student exchange program that the respondent is currently participating in when this interview is conducted. In learning Japanese accents in R13's environment, the respondent stated that they used a separate module, used the accent mark, then depicted the accent using a line. R13 also already know about an online accent dictionary called OJAD. R13 also stated that in the test in his learning environment, the respondent was tasked

to make a speech and then read it with the correct accent by looking for the correct accent patterns in the OJAD dictionary per word of the contents of the speech.

3 respondents participated in the Japanese Theatre activities in Jakarta, which are R10, R15, and R16. According to R16, the application of the Japanese accent is only focused on the stage, because the application of the Japanese accent according to the respondent is very difficult, thus for daily conversations speaking with the right accent is rather difficult for the respondent.

There are 4 respondents, which are R3, R5, R11, and R15 who have experienced miscommunication when having conversations with native Japanese speakers' due to errors in the pronunciation of Japanese accents.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In this study, the Japanese accents pronunciation of the Japanese Literature students at one of the private Japanese Language University in Jakarta was analyzed. The results found a form of error in the form of accent changes that do not match the speech data per word and sentence. In the interview, questions about the respondent's background both regarding language skills (regional language, foreign language learning) and the environment where the respondent lived were asked. From the results of the interviews, it was found that the respondents had studied Japanese for 3 years or above. Then, there are respondents who are currently or have lived in Japan by the time the interview was conducted. However, this background cannot be proven as the cause of mispronunciation of Japanese accents because it does not have a major effect on the results of data collection in the accuracy of Japanese accent pronunciation.

From the results of the interviews, it was also found that there was a possibility that Japanese accent pronunciation errors occurred due to several reasons, which are the number of respondents who felt that they had no difficulty pronouncing words and sentences in the reading text but made several mistakes in pronouncing Japanese accents, it can be assumed that this indicates a lack of attention to accents when speaking in Japanese, and many respondents feel that learning about Japanese accents in their learning environment is still lacking or even non-existent.



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