

Japanese Language Boom in India

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Indian education from the primary to university level needs to return to its ethical roots, instill discipline and globalize by introducing languages and values from other cultures. Apart from Indian interest in the French and German languages, the new global power alignments call for a renewed interest in the Japanese, Chinese and Korean languages. Of these three, interest in the learning of Japanese is on the rise. Japanese primary education lays great emphasis on moral and social commitment in a systematic fashion. Bringing the teaching of Japanese language into the mainstream Indian curricula, especially at the primary level, would strengthen its ethical and social base, creating a new India with global citizens of the future. However, this simple scenario is not easy to implement. As Dr. Ui Teramoto points out later in the section headed “The JLPT & MISJ Methods”, there is not only a “shortage” of qualified teachers but also a lack of effective teaching methods. Despite these problems, India’s growing connection with Japan and estrangement from China in the last decade has encouraged educational agencies like the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and some central Indian universities and colleges to initiate the integration of Japanese courses in their overall curricula.

The Japanese Boom in South Asia

The Japanese language boom in India seems a decade old but Indian interest in the Japanese language began in the early 1950s when the Indian Ministry of Defense and Vishwa Bharti University began offering Japanese classes to Indian students. In subsequent decades other Indian universities like Delhi, Pune and Jawaharlal Nehru University followed suit. Nearly four decades went by before a resurgence of interest in the Japanese language was felt again. When economic liberalization in India was initiated in 1991, Japan began to see the emergence of a market-oriented economy with chances of private capital influx and foreign investment in India. The Japanese government stepped in by opening the Japan Foundation office in New Delhi in 1993. Some top leaders within the Indian government also felt the need of Japanese proficiency for Indians. In 1997 Manmohan Singh, who later became prime minister from 2004 to 2014, suggested that India needed 10,000 Indians fluent in the Japanese language. Nearly two decades later the current prime minister, Narendra Modi, wants Indian primary education to modernize through the ethical standards and discipline of Japanese schools.

Digital Technology & the Teaching of Japanese

With the rise of digital technology, the demand for the learning of Japanese has also gone online, giving rise to quick acquisition of linguistic skills at a low price. The Internet has provided both the learning and testing of Japanese competence through its Sushi Test which allows learners to test their competence through a simple exam online. By registering online they can take the test as many times as they want. Many Indians anticipate new job opportunities after developing acceptable proficiency in Japanese, and feel they can better exchange ideas with Japanese people through Japanese language-based communication.

The demand for Japanese linguistic skills is undoubtedly on the increase. Both globalizing Japanese and Indian corporations are looking for translators, interpreters, instructors and administrators who can handle the nuances of Japanese culture through the Japanese language. The job profile of those who have a graduate degree and have also acquired the N1 or N2 levels of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test are not just qualified to get jobs as interpreters but also as managers, security experts or liaison officers. So opportunities multiply as Japanese linguistic skills increase. After acquiring such skills, young Indians can pursue their Master’s or Doctoral programs at Japanese universities to procure lucrative jobs in Japanese companies.

As Japanese companies are increasing their investment in India, the cities in which they set up their business are also being transformed. The language and culture of Japan is slowly burgeoning in cities like Chennai, Pune, Mumbai, NCR, Ahmedabad, Rohtak, Aurangabad, Bengaluru, Jhajjar, Neemrana and Dahej. Apart from established institutions teaching Japanese, private institutes such as the Hayakawa Japanese Language School Chennai, Vidya Prasarak Mandel Thane, Kizoku Japanese Language Institute South Delhi, and Orissa Computer Application Center Bhubaneshwar are also investing in the teaching of Japanese. An entire Japanese culture replete with Japanese cuisine, spices, stationary and home décor is mushrooming to cater to the demands of both Japanese and Indians interested in Japan. In these cities the demand for Indian professionals speaking Japanese has increased commensurably. Today over 15,000 Japanese professionals employed in the automobile, manufacturing and banking industries work in India. In the coming years over 30,000 Japanese companies are expected to enter India in the fields of automobile industry, information

technology, biotechnology, water purification, pharmaceuticals, marketing and finance. Such expansion will also require Japanese-trained professionals and consequently expand the Japanese language teaching-and-learning model. Japan's shrinking workforce also requires about 200,000 Indian professionals in the area of life sciences, agriculture, finance and the service industry.

The JET Program for Indians

Coming to Japan to teach English motivates many foreign students to learn Japanese. The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program which began in the 1980s has been creating opportunities for college graduates from abroad to find work in Japan as Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) or as Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs) and promote both the internationalization of Japan and imbibe Japanese culture. Those who come on the JET program either know Japanese or are motivated to learn the language. Envisaging the growing importance of India for Japan and the world, the Japanese government has reserved two CIRs for Indian students, one of which will go to a Kerala-based or Kerala-born Indian who is expected to promote friendly relations between the state of Kerala and Matsue city in Shimane Prefecture. However, Indian students applying must have a reasonable command of English and possess an N1 or N2 level Japanese proficiency certification.

Dearth of Trained Native & Foreign Japanese Teachers

The increase in Japanese business and industrial collaboration and academic partnerships with India in the last decade has generated interest in the learning and teaching of Japanese in educational institutes and generated strong demand for trained Japanese teachers. Though at present there are many colleges and universities in India which teach Japanese courses, the increasing demand to learn Japanese and find job opportunities both in India and Japan has caused a shortage of qualified teachers and effective methods of teaching Japanese through the medium of the English language. Though there are many Indian teachers teaching Japanese, Indian students prefer native Japanese teachers to learn authentic Japanese from them.

The boom in Japanese learning in India has not been commensurate with the number of native and foreign teachers qualified to teach Japanese. The reasons range from slow teaching methods and stereotypical cultural knowledge to low motivation of



St. Stephen's College, Delhi



A Japanese classroom in St. Stephen's College

native teachers to go to India and sub-standard salary structures. The shortage of qualified Japanese language teachers is felt not only in India but also Japan. Within Japan there is a dearth of Japanese teachers, especially those who would like to teach in India. The method of teaching Japanese is also an important component in imparting quick linguistic skills to Indian students and professionals through the medium of English in a short time. Both the Indian and Japanese governments have directed their attention to resolving this matter but no concrete plans exist either from the University Grants Commission or universities to expand the teaching of Japanese in Indian schools and colleges. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology is keen to expand the teaching of Japanese in India. So, on the one hand there is a boom in learning Japanese in India and on the other there is a shortage of faculty. Today many Indian IT and business companies expect their employees to know basic Japanese. Many IT and business professionals who want to enter the Japanese market want to send their representatives to Japan, especially those who are proficient in Japanese. Japan is still a monolingual culture and facility with the Japanese language can open doors to many opportunities which are otherwise closed.

As instructors and institutions become exercised by the slowness of traditional teaching methods, change is in the offing. Today instructors, think tanks and governments are finding new methods of imparting quick and thorough Japanese skills to non-Japanese speakers. The traditional Situational Functional Approach used in India to teach the Japanese language is often slow in instruction and weak in grammar. New methods of teaching can be addressed by the Learning Management System based on Moodle, an educational e-learning software package (MSBM) and Mikiko Iwasaki's Systematic Japanese method (MISJ). The MSBM method uses a free

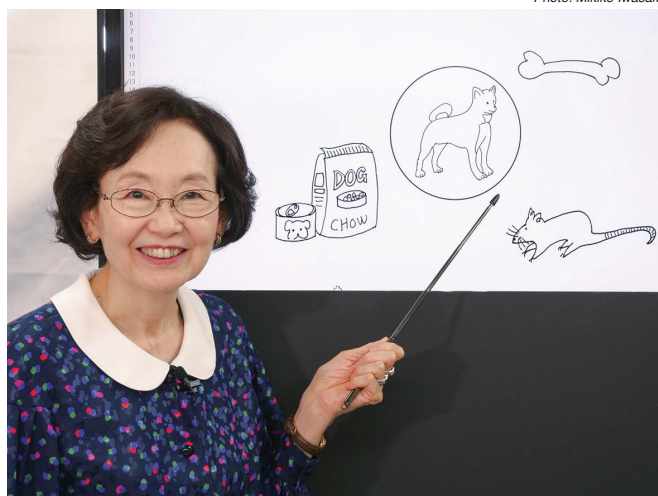


Photo: Mikiko Iwasaki

Mikiko Iwasaki teaching

open forum online to create a community of Japanese teachers and students to learn through interaction. The system has been tested by the Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad since 2016 and introduces Japanese business ethics, culture, dress and calligraphy. The MISJ method uses new techniques of learning and memorizing effectively tested in Africa and Japan. In the coming decades, it is expected that new policies will be framed both at the governmental and institutional levels to address this problem.

Shifting Linguistic Priorities in Asia & Impact on Japanese Learning

There has been a shift in language learning priorities in the last decade in Asia resulting in a decline of Japanese learning in major countries such as China, Indonesia and South Korea and an increase in India. According to the Japan Foundation, which conducts long-term analysis on gross numbers in Japanese language education abroad, as of 2015 there were over 3.6 million foreigners in 137 countries and regions studying Japanese, as well as 16,167 institutions and 64,000 teachers. Although nearly 70% of Japanese learners in the last decade have been Chinese, Indonesians and Koreans, this composition is rapidly undergoing change. The shift towards English in China and changes in the secondary education system making a second language optional in Indonesia and South Korea have led to a decrease of Japanese learners. Instead, other countries like India are gaining precedence.

Japan and India are keen to promote the teaching and learning of Japanese in India both at governmental and institutional levels. In September 2017 *The Times of India* reported that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on a visit to India reiterated the need for Indians to learn Japanese and take advantage of expanding Japanese-Indian

industrial collaboration. In the same article it was reported that Japan intends to open 100 Japanese language centers across India and a cultural convention center in Varanasi.

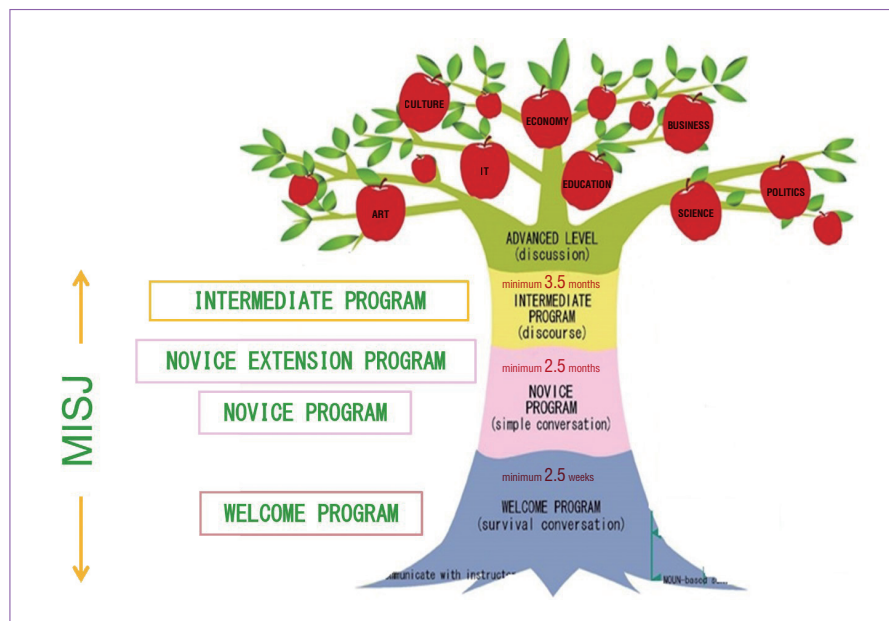
Supported by Japanese corporations and foundations, Indian universities are not lagging in the teaching of Japanese. The Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Delhi teaches three courses – a Master's program, a One-Year Post Graduate Intensive and an Advanced Diploma Courses in Japanese. For Indian students to pursue language and Master's programs in Japanese there are scholarships available for deserving students from Japanese organizations, such as Mitsubishi Corporation's International Scholarship, the Japan Foundation's Japanese language program for outstanding students, and the Japan Foundation's training program for university students studying at the Japanese Language Institute in Kansai. Apart from the Department of East Asian Studies, five constituent colleges of the University of Delhi – namely St. Stephen's College, Sri Guru Tej Bahadur Khalsa College, Laxmi Bai College, Daulat Ram College and Ramjas College – offer part-time one-year certificate, diploma and advanced diploma courses in Japanese. The English and Foreign Languages University at Hyderabad provides undergraduate and graduate programs in Japanese and plans to introduce the teaching of Japanese and Chinese in Lucknow.

The JLPT & MISJ Methods

The growing popularity of the new and avant-garde MISJ method amongst non-Japanese learners is cutting into the well-entrenched and traditional Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). The MISJ, developed in the 1990s, is taught through the English language and focuses on speaking and writing as against the traditionally-accepted and standardized JLPT which tests four aspects: vocabulary, listening, reading and grammar. The Japanese model of linguistic assessment developed in the 1980s was a byproduct of American socio-political and discursive practices. Yukiko Hatasa and Tomoko Watanabe in a 2017 online article, "Japanese as a Second Language Assessment in Japan", argue that the language tests were intrinsically developed as "placement tests" but now have expanded to include a wide range of learners. The JLPT established in 1984 by the Japan Foundation to evaluate the linguistic competence of non-Japanese learners is held annually in December. It establishes four hurdles in vocabulary, listening, reading and grammar and has three sections in each level. It is administered worldwide and controls quality through its annual evaluator report called the *Nihongo noryoku shiken bunseki hyoka ni kansuru hokokusho*, and the *Nihongo noryoku shiken shutsudai kijun* [Japanese Language Proficiency Test: Test Content Specifications], meant as a guideline for JLPT question paper setters which often determines the rationale for the curriculum and

CHART

Different levels of the MISJ method



Source: MISJ Tree by Mikiko Iwasaki

designing of courses in Japanese. However, the JLPT test assesses language-based knowledge and not real-life knowledge, which has been partially addressed by including task-based exercises.

Iwasaki realized that starting to learn 50 *Hiragana* and 50 *Katakana* words for a non-Japanese by reading only the written text was a “heavy burden”. Furthermore, using English sounds to pronounce Japanese words was not such a good strategy as the sounds often do not precisely match, so Iwasaki developed the MISJ Welcome Program with 12 lessons which introduce five to 10 letters each, and in which Romanization is gradually replaced by actual words. The question-and-answer technique further helps learners to memorize words creatively by responding to questions in their own way. This helps the brain to recognize new linguistic patterns built along the pattern of “OBJECT-*o* VERB-*masu*” and becomes a step-by-step creative-learning technique. Iwasaki believes that “remembering grammar” through repetition speeds the learning process and reduces the “burden of self-study”. The MISJ method is methodical for second-language learners and allows them to speak and write innovatively. The [Chart](#) explains the different levels of difficulties that each program allows the learner to master.

As can be seen from the [Chart](#), the MISJ method begins with the Welcome Program and moves up linguistic hurdles to the Advanced level. The rationale for MISJ was to devise a fast and effective way of acquiring Japanese language skills. Generally Japanese is said to take 80 weeks (2,400 hours) of study for fluent communication in a working-place environment, while learning European languages like

French and Spanish requires only 24 weeks (720 hours). Approximately triple the amount of time and effort is required to acquire proficiency in Japanese. To lessen this gap, MISJ offers a Welcome Program (24 hours study) for basic grammar and a Novice Program (80 hours study) for basic academic conversation. The Novice Program also prepares students to take the N4 level Japanese-Language Proficiency Test. All the four programs from Welcome to Advanced require in total nine months to complete.

Apart from less time spent in learning Japanese through the MISJ method, the structure of lessons is unique. Each lesson begins with grammar, followed by verbal practice, and ends with grammar-based conversation, while the conventional Situational Functional Approach begins with reading practice and a short conversation translation, followed by grammatical explanation and application. In the MISJ method, lessons aim to build grammar where students learn inflection of verbs, particles and numbers, essential to a sound understanding of the Japanese language. In this way, MISJ focuses on establishing a mental “processor” or creating grammatical devices in the mind which help learners to freely compose sentences unique to their individual profession.

The benefits of the MISJ method are now displacing some of the traditional approaches to language learning. The MISJ method has been effectively tested both in Japan and in African and other Asian countries. Since 2010 Professor Yoko Hasebe of Keio University-SFC has successfully tested the MISJ method in her ACADEX Project Program in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo using



Photo: Author

(L to R) Ui Teramoto, Mikiko Iwasaki, Mukesh William and Yoko Hasebe



Photo: Author

Japanese teacher with Indian students, St. Stephen's College

both Japanese and Congolese instructors. Many Japanese universities and companies such as the Nara Institute of Science and Technology, The Graduate School for Advanced Studies in Kanagawa Prefecture, Alliance Software Japan and Nissan Automotive Technology in Vietnam have also started employing the MISJ method to train foreign students and employees.

The MISJ method has a global outreach for the Anglophonic world. As instruction in MISJ is primarily in English, it is advantageous to English speakers only. Most professionals in the IT and manufacturing industries would find the fast and repetitive method quite useful, though graduate students might find it boring. If a non-Japanese would-be teacher speaks English, the MISJ method provides speedy training as lessons are meticulously planned to the last detail and therefore easy to complete. In the last two decades over 250 people, not only Japanese but also Congolese and Vietnamese, have completed the Welcome Program and Novice Program for teachers and have started teaching in universities and companies as certified MISJ teachers. Programs under the same name are also meant for students.

As the MISJ method focuses on implanting a new “mental processor”, students are expected to learn by rote. Through this process they can remember 70% of the lesson, thus drastically reducing self-study time. However, since the method is unrecognized many teachers who complete the MISJ Welcome Program find it hard to get a job in educational and non-educational institutions. To overcome this problem, motivated and trained teachers using different teaching methods should be brought into the larger Japanese teaching network, such as the Sakura Networks of the Japan Foundation.

Realistic Understanding of Indian Ethos Needed

The Asian ethos has been both stereotyped and misrepresented by the media around the world. This creates anxiety among Japanese professionals about Asian society, work and life, preventing them from opting for Asia as their destination. Japanese teachers who have a desire to teach in Asian countries like India, the Philippines or Singapore have a stereotypical image of their culture and salary. A deeper awareness through intercultural exchanges within Asia can help Japanese youth to understand other Asian countries better and dispel their fears of a stereotypical Asia filled with disease, poverty and violence. They can then bring their own culture and enrich the regional climate of Asia. There are many Japanese companies which now collaborate with their Indian counterparts to run projects in India requiring knowledge of the Japanese language. A sound knowledge of Japanese can help the execution of such projects on time.

Nearly four decades have gone by since linguistic testing methods like the JLPT were developed, and global realities have changed. American hegemony is on the wane and Japan has emerged as a major force in the world. Japanese linguists and scholars, from time to time, have tried to devise their own unique methods to impart training in the fundamentals of the Japanese language to a global clientele. But old habits die hard and they find it difficult to make much headway. In an increasingly multicultural world with English as the lingua franca, the teaching of Japanese language must be based on mutual respect for other cultures.

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