

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

As some studies have pointed out there is hitherto no established pronunciation syllabus for Japanese as a foreign/second language (JFL/JSL) and this is one of the reasons that pronunciation learning/teaching is not given much importance and is dealt with at each teacher's discretion in teaching JFL/JSL (e.g., Matsuzaki, 2001; Kawano, 2007) Unfortunately teaching JFL in Thailand is no exception: that is to say, both native and non native JFL teachers in Thailand give insufficient instruction on pronunciation or deal with pronunciation in an incidental manner (Chiba, 2000; Ogawara Kawano, 2002; Yupaka, Isomura Pakatip, 2008)

Since many of, if not all, the pronunciation problems are derived from learners' L1 Matsuzaki Kawano, 1998; Sakoda, 2002, it is reasonable to assume that designing pronunciation syllabus and making learning materials for pronunciation learning according to learners' L1 is important. In other words, it is essential for us, as JFL teachers in Thailand, to make an effort to design pronunciation syllabus and curriculum for Thai speaking JFL learners (hereafter cited as TL) According to The Society for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language (1991: 14), the term "syllabus" is defined as "the whole of items and contents of learning/teaching in a course" Therefore we have to determine what should be taught first

In addition to this some scholars have found that the present situation in which there is little appropriate teaching/learning materials on pronunciation may lead many teachers to give little instruction on pronunciation (e.g., Chiba, 2000; Ogawara Kawano, 2002). In Chiba's (2000) study, for instance, he found the following comments from teachers: "If I can use the textbooks with representing prosody such as pitch accent, it will be very useful. But it is hard to find such textbooks" This kind of teacher's opinion also serves as evidence of the necessity for making appropriate teaching/learning materials on pronunciation.

Furthermore, teachers' lack of knowledge of adequate teaching methods is also the reason for insufficient instruction on pronunciation (Chiba, 2000; Ogawara Kawano, 2002). Also, as Derwing Munro (2005: 390) have pointed out, inappropriate instruction which is due to teachers' lack of knowledge can do more harm than good for learners. Thus, if we can provide the information of adequate and useful teaching methods of pronunciation, it can facilitate JFL teachers in Thailand (hereafter cited as JT) to teach pronunciation to TL

Thus, the examination of the pronunciation problems of TL is required in order to design pronunciation syllabus. Furthermore, examining JT's actual teaching practice of pronunciation, along with the difficulties and problems which they encounter, in order to develop useful and effective teaching/learning materials on pronunciation is required.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the following three issues

TL's pronunciation problems;

JT's actual teaching practice on pronunciation and

JT's problems and difficulties in teaching pronunciation

Glossary

Table 1 The definitions of the terms used in this paper

Terms	Definition
JFL	Japanese as a foreign language
JSL	Japanese as a second language
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESL	English as a second language
L1	first language
TL	JFL learners whose L1 is Thai
JT	JFL teacher in Thailand whose L1 is Japanese
pronunciation problems	phonetic problems that TL have when they speak Japanese
semi structured interview	a flexible interview which allows new questions to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says

As represented in Table 1, the term “TL” in this study is defined as “JFL learners whose L1 is Thai” and the term “JT” is defined as “JFL teacher in Thailand whose L1 is Japanese”, respectively by our own definition. We will use the term “pronunciation problems” in this study to refer to “phonetic problems that TL have when they speak Japanese”.

The term “semi structured interview” in this study is defined as “a flexible interview which allows new questions to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says” by our own definition. The details of the semi structured interview will be given in Chapter 3.

1.4 Scope

Our main target groups in this study will be TL in elementary and intermediate levels and JT who are teaching TL in those levels due to the following two reasons. Firstly, the number of TL in advanced level is relatively small (The Japan Foundation Japanese Language Institute, Urawa). Secondly, learners in advanced level are considered to have less pronunciation problems than those in elementary and intermediate levels (Kawano 2003:32). Furthermore, our target groups will be TL/JT who are learning/teaching JFL in Bangkok and its vicinity for reasons of expediency of interviews. Thus, TL/JT in other districts are not dealt with in this study.

Benefits

The results of this study can provide

- useful information that facilitate JT when they teach Japanese pronunciation to their learners (i.e., TL)
- the data required to design pronunciation syllabus and to develop helpful pronunciation teaching/learning materials for both TL and JT