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RESEARCH ON GENERAL ISSUES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A FOCUS ON JAPANESE

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Abstract: This article explores the major challenges encountered by multilingual learners — specifically Uzbek speakers with knowledge of Russian and English — when acquiring Japanese as an additional language. In today's rapidly evolving world, multilingualism has become increasingly common, yet mastering a new language still involves significant cognitive, cultural, and structural difficulties. Drawing from personal experience, the author highlights the complexities of Japanese, particularly its three-script writing system (hiragana, katakana, and kanji), the multiple readings of kanji, and the culturally embedded system of politeness (keigo). While similarities between languages may initially provide a sense of comfort, Japanese often presents unfamiliar structures that require sustained effort to master. The article also explains that learning a second or third language can facilitate the acquisition of further languages due to enhanced

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cognitive flexibility. Ultimately, the text argues that although Japanese is widely perceived as difficult—especially among speakers of non-East Asian languages—systematic learning strategies, cultural understanding, and mnemonic methods can significantly ease the process.

Keywords: multilingualism, kanji, hiragana and katakana, keigo, language difficulty, cognitive flexibility.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada ko‘p tilli o‘rganuvchilarning — xususan rus va ingliz tillarini biladigan o‘zbek tiliga mansub shaxslarning — qo‘sishimcha til sifatida yapon tilini o‘rganish jarayonida duch keladigan asosiy qiyinchiliklari tahlil qilinadi. Hozirgi tez rivojlanayotgan dunyoda ko‘p tillilik tobora odatiy holga aylangan bo‘lsa-da, yangi tilni egallash jarayoni hali ham sezilarli darajada lingvistik, kognitiv va madaniy to‘siqlarni o‘z ichiga oladi. Muallif o‘z tajribasidan kelib chiqib, yapon tilining murakkab jihatlarini — uch yozuv tizimi (hiragana, katakana va kanji), kanjilarning bir nechta o‘qilishi hamda tilga chuqur singib ketgan keigo (hurmat ifodalash tizimi)ni — batafsil yoritadi. Til o‘rtasidagi o‘xshashliklar ba’zan qulaylik bersa-da, yapon tili odatda o‘rganuvchi uchun notanish grammatik va fonetik tuzilmalari bilan murakkablik tug‘diradi. Maqolada, shuningdek, ikkinchi yoki uchinchi tilni o‘rgangan shaxslarning keyingi tillarni osonroq o‘zlashtirishi ularning kognitiv moslashuvchanligi ortishi bilan izohlanadi. Yakunda, yapon tili ko‘pchilik tomonidan eng qiyin tillardan biri sifatida qabul qilinsa-da, tizimli yondashuv, madaniy bilim va mnemonik metodlardan foydalanish orqali o‘rganish jarayonini sezilarli darajada yengillashtirish mumkinligi ta’kidlanadi.

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Kalit so‘zlar: ko‘ptillilik, kanji, hiragana, katakana, keigo, til murakkabligi, kognitiv moslashuvchanlik.

Introduction. In a rapidly developing world, it is becoming increasingly common to encounter people who possess at least two other languages besides their native one, and explore the other brand-new side of their world by conversing in those languages. And of course, until acquiring the capacity to facilitate native-speaker-level, it is natural for a person to encounter **many difficulties** in the progress of learning. At some point, hardships in mastering another language can often be due to unfamiliar grammatical structures and/or the cultural influence of native speakers on the use of the language.

During the training time, a case is evident where the learner challenges obstacles in the process, still “painless” spots over and above to cope with. The curious **paradox** is acknowledged by the discovery of similarity in grammatical structures and/or substantially identical pronunciation of the words. By those indexed advantages, a learner apprehends some **moral comfort** to remain despite difficulties in mastering.

Another thing that should be noted is that if a learner has already possessed one new language, in essence, is able to communicate in two languages, it would be manageable **to master** third and subsequent languages. The reason is that brain activity accelerates the process of new functioning and comprehension when a new language is learned after the mother tongue. Engaging in language learning enhances **cognitive flexibility**, such as multitasking abilities and problem-solving skills. Practicing it is a mentally challenging activity.

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There are countless difficulties when learning Japanese. Speaking from my own experience, learning Japanese “unlocked” the world within the unusual world. To be more precise, this language forces a reconsideration of the decision to acquire it from the very beginning and embraces with “surprises” a long-drawn process. According to the mentioned issues, as an Uzbek speaker, there was a belief that “learning another foreign language after Russian and English would be much easier!” The initial process was demanding, whereas the ongoing progression is becoming simpler to manage.

From an alternative perspective, both novice and experienced language learners are known to find the East-Asian language family to be extremely difficult. They may question themselves:

Is this really the case, though?

Is learning Japanese difficult?

Major difficulties. Japanese language is characterized by the combination of the alphabet and kanjis (taken from Chinese characters). Essentially, there are some primary features of Japanese that are considered to cause stress in individuals and contribute to the language’s reputation for difficulty:

- **Alphabets**
- **Kanji**
- **The System of Politeness (Keigo)**

As an Uzbek, and speaker of two other languages (Russian and English) I have a dominant advantage right from the start: I am able to write (read in some

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cases) every letter. The Latin alphabet is shared by all of these languages, yet they employ it to create distinct words with various spelling and pronunciation conventions.

To begin with, the process of studying begins with the two *abnormal* alphabets, which are “hiragana and katakana”, consisting of *46 characters* in each. To emphasize the point, the characters represent syllables rather than individual sounds, accurately *five vowel sounds, forty consonant-vowel* (letters/characters) *combinations*, and confusingly *one letter* either pronounced as (*m*) or (*n*). In order to say it, individuals close the lips and make a sound by allowing air to pass out through the nose.

Making a point with the intention of *hiragana* (considered as the first alphabet) is used for reading/writing the kanjis, basically used only for the Japanese origin words. In ancient times, before the *changeover* to the three main writing systems (hiragana, katakana, and kanji), the hiragana was the only alphabet that was used.

For words that originate from foreign languages, *katakana* (considered the second alphabet) is used. Additionally, some beliefs are based on recognition of hiragana, which points to the fact that the hiragana was only used by women in the earlier period. Moreover, the katakana was used by men, and this is considered a reason for the sharpness in writing characters.

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hiragana										
あ	か	さ	さ	な	は	ば	ば	ほ	やら	わ
あ	き	し	す	に	ひ	ひ	み	り	りん	そ
う	き	す	つ	ぬ	ふ	ふ	ゆ	ろ	ろ	ろ
え	え	け	て	ね	へ	へ	も	れ	ろ	わ
わ	や	よ	た	の	ほ	も	よ	ろ	わん	ん
き	や	や	や	や	や	や	や	や	や	やん
や	や	汚	甘	そ	ね	ほ	そ	ろ	ん	ん

Katakana										
ア	カ	キ	カ	ナ	ハ	マ	ヤ	ラ	ワ	ワ
サ	サ	シ	シ	シ	シ	ヒ	ソ	ソ	リ	
タ	タ	チ	チ	ツ	ツ	テ	ト	ト	レ	ン
ハ	ヒ	ヒ	フ	フ	ネ	ヘ	ホ	コ	ワ	
ワ	ワ	ユ	ヌ	ヌ	ス	ヌ	ン	ン	ン	ン
キ	ヤ	キ	キ	キ	コ	キ	ヨ	ウ	ン	ン

[1]

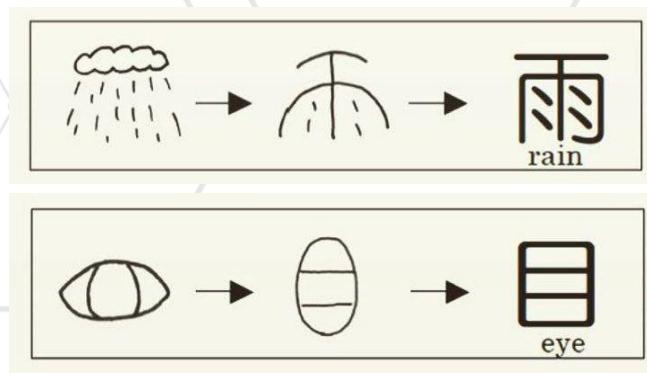
Kanji originated in China, and characters were introduced to Japan for the purpose of a better relationship. In the early 5th century *kanji* was adapted to Japanese. Japanese *kanji* factor for the meanings, in contrast to hiragana and katakana. Language contains over 5,000 *kanji* or characters (sometimes letters). Roughly 2,000 *kanji* (characters/letters) that are deemed “common use” (also known as *jouyou kanji*).

Kanji characters are often composed of smaller components called radicals, which makes it simpler for learners to memorize and understand the pronunciation of characters. *Kanji* has multiple readings/meanings (**onyomi 音読み** み: readings derived from the Chinese pronunciations and **kunyomi 訓読み**: the original, indigenous Japanese readings) depending on in which context it is used.

Nevertheless, learning the *kanji* can be aided. As a fair illustration, for important gatherings, Japanese people have a habit of wearing their national

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costume called “kimono”. 着物 (*kimono*): 着 (ki) is “to wear”, and 物 (mono) is “thing”. The definition of the word “kimono” is “(some)thing to wear”. During the time of learning kanji, the use of the mnemonic method is recommended. Mnemonic method upgrades memory retention and recall by attaching new data to related cues, which can be more efficient than rote memorization.



[2]

The culture of Japan has an uncommon bond between traditional morals and modernity. After the Meiji restoration, the culture was enriched by the delicate subtleties of America and Western culture. By means of extraordinary and divergent Japanese culture, it was “refined”. The “rules” of Japanese culture are embedded within the language. The system of “Keigo” (敬語) or “politeness” system is another substantial factor for students of the language. Honorific speech is crucial when addressing others of higher rank, such as professors, authorities, supervisors, and managers. Two main concepts of “Keigo” are: initially, the spokesman modifies himself to minimize his deeds or ideas. Conversely, the speakers praise the actions and thoughts of the person who is superior to them. The choice of words and the way s/he conjugates her/his Japanese verbs cause both of these things to occur simultaneously.

Followingly, certain words, such as 食べる (*taberu*), to eat

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completely, shift to 召し上がる (*meshi agaru*) in keigo. The essential outcome is that the speaker avoids inadvertently praising himself and demeaning his listeners. In Japanese society, such actions are regarded as one of the disrespectful responses to the dignity.

In sum, the process of learning Japanese as an additional language presents a unique combination of linguistic, cognitive, and cultural challenges, particularly for Uzbek speakers who already possess knowledge of Russian and English. While prior multilingual experience can facilitate cognitive flexibility and enhance the ability to acquire new languages, Japanese often introduces unfamiliar structures that require persistence, strategy, and cultural insight. Its three-script writing system, the complexity of kanji with multiple readings, and the deeply rooted politeness system (keigo) collectively demand sustained effort and a readiness to engage with entirely new modes of expression.

Nevertheless, as highlighted throughout this study, the difficulties associated with Japanese are not insurmountable. By employing systematic learning techniques, utilizing mnemonic methods, and cultivating an understanding of the cultural foundations embedded within the language, learners can significantly ease the acquisition process. Ultimately, Japanese, though widely perceived as one of the most difficult languages for non-East Asian speakers, becomes more accessible when approached with informed strategies and an appreciation for its linguistic and cultural depth. The experience of mastering it not only broadens communicative competence but also opens the door to a richer understanding of Japanese society and intercultural communication as a whole.

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