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Abstract :

Unlike English in particular and to some extent French, which are spoken by millions who are not native speakers of the language, Japanese is primarily spoken by its native speakers who constitute around 127 millions. Because the Japanese language has not spread extensively outside its own islands, Japanese – and to a large extent Chinese – has not been able to earn for itself an international solid footing among the main most widely spread languages of the world. However, the rise of Japan as a super technological power and the second most powerful economy in the world (next to USA) has, somehow, endowed both the Japanese language and culture with some exceptional flavor and led many non-native speakers to study it. There are other reasons that may account for the “non-internationalization” of the Japanese language, but we do not discuss them here. Instead, we focus on only the characteristics of the language itself that seem to discourage learners from outside Japan to try to continue doing more effort to delve deeply into the language or to try to reach a near-native fluency in it. Those language characteristics (particularly its various written systems of writing) have made some westerners attempting to study Japanese describe it as “a satanic language”. Others who studied it from a purely linguistic perspective (disregarding its difficult and different systems of writing) have described it in much more objective terms as a language that is as systematic as any other language (since any language has inherently built-in systematic patterns).

We present in this study some of those language difficulties facing non-native speakers of Japanese with particular reference to Arab learners

learning Japanese, and suggest some teaching techniques that are likely to help in surmounting those language difficulties. Those difficulties can be classified into five main topics:

- (1) Sounds of the Japanese language (its phonemic and phonetic systems).
- (2) The written iconic letters as well as the different forms the Japanese Systems of writing.
- (3) The cultural aspects and background of some important vocabulary items.
- (4) Some grammatical and syntactic features of Japanese that foreign learners must pay special attention to.
- (5) The language forms associated with the different degrees of politeness which if handled inappropriately can impede communication or cause communication failure.