The Teaching of Indonesian in Japan:

With Special Reference to the Present Existing Materials

I MADE MARKUS

Well-prepared teaching materials are one of the most important elements in the process of teaching and learning a language as a second or foreign language. Most language teachers will spend most of their preparation time on selecting, adapting, and/or even developing suitable materials. If enough good materials are already available on the market, they will select the best materials at hand to be used for their classroom teaching. From time to time they may need to adapt them to some degree to meet their teaching objectives, classroom situations and learners conditions, no matter how well the materials will have been previously developed by their writers. In order to meet the immediate situation around the school where the learners learn or the city where the learners live, some adaptation of some sort is always needed to make the materials more relevant and interesting to the learners, which will hopefully make them learn the target language more effectively.

The job of the teachers will be harder when they have to develop their teaching materials from scratch because they cannot find any good materials available on the market which they can choose. Many times they have to start from designing a syllabus before they write suitable materials for their teaching purposes.

This paper is a rough description of some of the outstanding features of several textbooks on Indonesian which I have used as references for the teaching of Indonesian as a foreign language in Japan. It will focus on both their good qualities and shortcomings with some suggestions for a more interactive and communicative type of language teaching and learning in the classroom.

Indonesian as a Foreign Language in Japan

Indonesian is at present taught in Japan as a foreign language at college level. It has not yet been introduced at lower levels unlike English (from primary schools in big cities), or Chinese and Korean (from senior high schools in some schools). Indonesian is not used as a means of any communication outside the classroom. This foreign setting hinders the process of teaching and learning it at school since exposure to the language (usually called input) is extremely limited, if not completely absent from the learner’s everyday life environment. In addition, we cannot expect that he will have any opportunity to interact in the target language in the community, either. As a result, he may never produce any utterances as an output in the target language at all. The only hope is that these three basic requirements (input, interaction and output) for better learning can be expected from what the teacher can provide in the limited number of meetings in the classroom. To help the teacher do the job better, a good
A textbook containing enough interactive and communicative activities is badly needed. If not, the teacher herself has to develop some supplementary exercises to enrich the classroom environment with adequate input, interaction and output for better instructed acquisition (cf. Ellis, 1990).

**Input and Intake**

Richards, Platt and Platt (1999: 182) define input as “language a learner hears or receives and from which he or she can learn.” They also make a distinction between input and intake. They define intake as “input which is actually helpful for the learner” because some of the input may be “too rapid or difficult for the learner to understand” so it is just noise which cannot help the learner to learn the language.

Many times, the teacher fails to provide enough input or intake in the classroom because she tends to talk in the learner’s first language, in this case in Japanese, to explain about the linguistic (phonological, morphological, syntactical and/or semantic) systems of the target language rather than in the target language itself, in this case in Indonesian, in its simpler form and slower rate of production as to provide more intake to the learner.

**Interaction in the Classroom**

Another classroom characteristic which is necessary for better language learning is the presence of interactive features of learning where a learner negotiates meanings with another learner or his teacher to make the input comprehensible (cf. comprehensible input hypothesis of Krashen, 1984). He may make clarification requests, such as “What do you mean by welfare”, confirmation checks “Mexican food have a lot of ulcers? Because of the food?”, or comprehension checks “Do you know what I mean?” (Ellis, 1990: 108).

In many Indonesian language classrooms in Japan, for a number of reasons these interactive features may not be present at all. The learner tends to be sitting quietly and happily absorbing all information available in the textbooks and doing all written exercises he is supposed to do. He hardly ever negotiates his meanings. He never makes clarification requests, confirmation checks nor comprehension checks in Indonesian either to his teacher or to his classmates. The main reason may be due to the fact that the textbooks used provide very little or no interactive exercises at all which expect the learners to interact with one another to negotiate their meanings.

**Output in the Target Language**

Output is the target language a learner produces as he tries to learn it with all possible errors he may still be making. Some linguists (initially Selinker, 1972) call this output an interlanguage as it is a language still heavily affected by the system of the mother tongue (L1) but is gradually approaching the system of his new language (L2). In the process of learning a new language, a learner is supposed to produce as much output in the target language as possible so as to continually and gradually improve it approaching a mastery of the target language system.
As mentioned above there are very little or no interactive activities at all in many Indonesian language classrooms in Japan, so we cannot expect much oral output in Indonesian from the learner throughout the course to help foster his oral proficiency in the target language. There maybe some written output from the more traditional written exercises but since Indonesian is a living language which is primarily oral in nature, many learners will be naturally more interested in developing oral proficiency in the language on top of writing proficiency.

In order to achieve the objective of oral proficiency in the target language, it appears that these three things: input, interaction and output have to be optimally provided for the learner both in quantity and quality (cf. Markus, 1998: 34–40).

Outstanding Features of Some Indonesian Textbooks in Japan

The Format
A typical format of the textbooks is as follows. (1) Lessons are introduced with a typical dialogue between two speakers emphasizing a particular function such as greetings, introducing oneself, inviting and so on, or a situation such as at the bank, at the post office, at the restaurant and so on, or a particular topic like food, drink, fruits, vegetables, animals, houses and so on. This is followed by (2) a list of new words and typical expressions used in the dialogue with their Japanese equivalents. Some textbooks provide the Japanese equivalent of the complete dialogue, which makes it easier for the learner to understand and follow. Some give a cultural note in Japanese referring to a particular word and/or expression. The next section (3) is a grammar section where a typical structure is put in a table or structural pattern with some explanations in Japanese. Then comes (4) a practice section which gives mainly written exercises for the students to do in class or at home. Some textbooks give a reading text at the end of every unit without any reading exercises as follow-ups.

The Good Qualities
To a certain extent, the Indonesian textbooks have followed the most recent developments in language textbook design with the commonly used format design as described above, especially the situational, functional or topical course design rather than the more traditional structural type. These new designs will be more interesting as well as more relevant and closer to the learner’s needs and wants in learning a new language.

The explanations in Japanese of the cultural features and common expressions will be very useful for the learner. They can also stimulate the learner’s interest and motivation to learn the new language and culture as, to his surprise, there are many new and interesting features to learn which are very different from his language and cultural backgrounds.

The grammar section in a structural pattern is also very helpful as it shows clearly how the grammar of the target language works, which in this case is very different from Japanese. The learner needs to switch his mind from his first language system to the new system of Indonesian.

The cohesive and interesting reading text at the end of every unit compensates for the more traditional discrete type of exercises dominating the practice section. It also can sum-up the language points being emphasized in the unit with some Indonesian cultural flavour.
Many textbooks have recorded tapes to accompany their use in the classroom. These tapes endeavour to bring the native pronunciation of Indonesian speakers to the learner in the classroom. With a language laboratory in his school, a learner can have more individual practice at his own time and at his own pace from time to time.

A Common Weakness
The most serious weakness of these textbooks is in the practice section, which is the most important part of a unit in a language textbook. This section is usually devoted to doing written exercises which tend to emphasize the receptive mastery of the target language, especially its grammar and vocabulary. Some give multiple-choice exercises which expect the learner to show his receptive mastery of the best forms of the words, expressions or sentences taught in the unit. He may have a good knowledge about Indonesian but he may not have learned it yet. He may not have learned how to use it as a means of expressing his ideas, opinions and feelings. He may have never produced any meaningful oral output of his own even in simple Indonesian to express his meanings throughout the course because more interactive exercises have not been adequately provided. As a result, he may not have had the opportunity to improve his interlanguage during the course, if he has developed some at one stage earlier.

A Suggestion
In view of achieving the more practical value of learning a new language in this era of global information and communication, we need to provide the learner with both productive as well as receptive mastery of the new language, right from the first lesson. The idea of a little language is very relevant in this case (cf. George, 1975). With a very limited number of words and grammatical patterns of Indonesian, the learner has been trained from the first lesson to use Indonesian as a little language which is a means of real communication to express his ideas, opinions and feelings with his teacher and friends. To do so, some interactive and more communicative exercises need to be provided from the first unit of a language textbook in two forms.

The first form is more structured in nature which can go nicely with the grammar section. Littlewood (1983: 1–7) introduces graded exercises from structural drills which give the learner the linguistic competence needed to be able to produce grammatically and phonologically correct sentences as fluently as possible in the target language (emphasizing the form) moving to more meaningful and communicative exercises which emphasize the meaning rather than merely the form. In this grammar section, the structural patterns are to be practiced mechanically with repetition, substitution and transformation drills in order to achieve correct pronunciation and automatically fluent mastery of the sentence patterns. Then some more meaningful rather than just mechanical practice should be provided with some real facts which are true to the real life of the learner. If a learner does not have a younger bother, he is not supposed to say this sentence:

*Saya mempunyai seorang adik laki-laki “I have a younger brother”

as a reply to his partner’s question *Apakah Anda mempunyai seorang adik laki-laki? “Do you have a younger brother?”* Instead, he is supposed to say: *Saya tidak mempunyai seorang adik *
laki-laki “I do not have a younger brother” with an extra piece of information to clarify his meaning. Saya mempunyai seorang kakak laki-laki “I have an older brother” if he actually has an older brother.

The second form is less structured and is also meant for reviewing and consolidating the previous learning points. These exercises can be graded from the more functional communication exercises, which emphasize the functional meanings of the expressions, to the more social interaction activities which emphasize the social meanings of the structural points of the unit (Littlewood, 1983: 22–64).

In expressing the functional meanings, the learner primarily tries to get his meanings across as clearly as possible, if necessary still neglecting their appropriateness to some sociolinguistic variables such as participants, setting and topic of the discourse. The most popular type of exercise for doing this is the exercise with a gap of information between a pair of learners where one has a piece of information which the other one does not. The purpose of the exercise is to fill this gap using the target language as much as they can in the end both of them will share the same information. Other exercises of this form include, among others, the ones showing picture differences, drawing pictures through following certain instructions, filling crossword puzzles, doing a survey, filling blind maps. A first attempt to provide some of these exercises has been made by me for my students (see Markus, 2001a and 2001b).

In expressing the social meanings of the expressions (which may be the final stage and the most difficult of the exercises) in addition to expressing his functional meanings, the learner needs gradually to pay attention to their appropriateness as well. The simplest type of exercise for this purpose is the roleplay which is popular in many English textbooks. A pair of learners can play the role of a teacher and a student, a doctor and a patient, a shopkeeper and a customer, a father and a son/daughter, a thief and a policeman and so on. The more difficult and comprehensive types can be postponed to a more advanced level of the course which might include exercises where learners act according to different levels of status in meetings, parties and debates of various kinds with a variety of participants (high and low-rank officials) and situations (formal and informal).

Both of these forms of exercises, developing proficiency in expressing functional and social meanings might go into the practice section of the textbook which may take a few pages for itself. In this part lie the strengths of a textbook which is geared to teach a new language and not only to teach about it. It will provide the learner with many opportunities to gain input or intake in Indonesian from his partner which will help his learning. He also has many opportunities to interact with his partner when he has to negotiate his meanings. As well, he has to produce output in the target language which will lead him to approach the mastery of his new language. In other words, these exercises are rich in input, interaction and output in the target language.

Conclusion

It seems to me therefore, that the existing textbooks on Indonesian as a foreign language in Japan are mainly suitable for developing a good knowledge about the target language of Indonesian and its culture, but are still inadequate to developing the present and future most
needed proficiency of really using it as a means of everyday communication. Classroom teachers must devote a lot of their time and energy to developing more interactive and communicative exercises or activities to supplement them.

**Acknowledgements**

I wish to extend my deepest appreciation to Michael Herriman and Lusi Handayani for their comments and suggestions on the earlier version of this paper. All oversights are of course mine.

**References**


