SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE PROBLEMS OF
NATIVE SINGHALA SPEAKERS IN ACQUIRING JAPANESE
PRONUNCIATIONS

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In teaching a second language if the teacher does not know the learner's
native language, the teacher can't predict the learner's errors and can't teach
effectively. These days, the number of learners of the Japanese language is
increasing in Sri Lanka. However, no work has been done on what kind of
problems Sinhala speakers have in learning Japanese in terms of contrastive
linguistics. In this article, I focus on investigating the problems that might arise
when the native speakers of Sinhala learn Japanese pronunciations.

1. Vowels

1.1 The vowels of Sinhala and Japanese are given as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sinhala</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iː</td>
<td>uː</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eː</td>
<td>oː</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>æ æː</td>
<td>aː</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2 Sinhala has short vowel vs. long vowel contrasts, as illustrated below:

- [iːɾi] 'lines' : [iɾi] 'sow'
- [eːkə] 'one' : [eːkə] 'that one'
- [pæɾi] 'huts' : [pæɾi] 'a kind of measure'
- [baɾə] 'weight' : [baɾə] 'vows'

Also in Japanese vowels contrast in length:

- [oːɾiɾan] 'uncle' : [oɾiɾan] 'grandfather'
- [oːɾaɾan] 'aunt' : [oɾaɾan] 'grandmother'
- [oːɾuɾan] 'put' : [oɾuɾan] 'much'

Since the duration of a long vowel is longer than twice that of a short vowel in
both languages, it is not difficult for Sinhala speakers to pronounce Japanese
long vowels.

1.3 Since the change of /a/ → /o/ takes place in a medial or final open syllable
in Sinhala, Sinhala speakers tend to use /o/ in place of /ə/ in Japanese: