

“The Joy of Language Learning in Autumn”

“pero, perro, pelo.” Let me say them again: “pero,” “perro,” and “pelo.”

These three words are all Spanish words. I will explain their meanings in a moment, but first I would like to talk about some characteristics of Spanish pronunciation.

Spanish pronunciation is quite similar to Japanese. Like Japanese, it is based on combinations of consonants and vowels. In Japanese elementary schools, children learn the sounds “a, i, u, e, o,” while in Spanish-speaking countries, children learn the vowels in the order “a, e, i, o, u.” Because of this similarity, Japanese people can often hear and reproduce Spanish sounds even when they do not understand the meaning of the words.

In addition, Spanish allows a degree of flexibility in word order, much like Japanese. As long as the subject and other important information are understood, parts of a sentence may be omitted or rearranged. For example, the English sentence “I want it.” can be translated into Spanish as “Yo quiero esto.” However, “Esto yo quiero” or even “Esto quiero” can also be acceptable. In everyday conversation, people often simply say “Quiero esto.”

However, there is one area of Spanish pronunciation that is particularly difficult for Japanese speakers. It involves the three words I mentioned earlier: pero, perro, and pelo. Because these words contain the sounds R and L, many Japanese learners find them challenging.

pero = “but” perro = “dog” pelo = “hair”

These words have completely different meanings. In most situations, native speakers can understand what you mean from the context, even if your pronunciation is not perfect. However, incorrect pronunciation can sometimes sound unnatural or even cause misunderstandings.

For example, the sentence “Me gustan los perros.” means “I like dogs.” But if it is pronounced as “Me gustan los pelos,” it could be understood as “I like hair.”

Did you know that Japanese also contains sounds that are difficult for many foreign learners? One example is the distinction between “da” and “ra.” For native Japanese speakers, these sounds are easy to tell apart. However, when we try pronouncing them carefully, we notice that the difference is actually quite subtle. If you pay attention to the position of the tongue inside the mouth, you will see that only a very slight movement separates the two sounds.

In fact, confusion between the ra-row(ra-ri-ru-re-ro) and da-row(da-ji-zu-de-do) sounds can even be found among native Japanese speakers. Some regional dialects reflect this tendency. In parts of Fukuoka and Niigata, for example, “udon-ya(うどん屋)” may be pronounced “uron-ya(うろん屋),” and “sō darō(そうだらう)” may sound more like “sō rarō(そうららう).” And if we listen carefully to the way we speak, regardless of the region, we find that the pronunciation of “da” and “ra” is actually rather ambiguous. It is not uncommon to hear “tomodachi(ともだち)” pronounced as “tomorachi(ともらち),” or “budō o taberu(ぶどうを食べる)” as “burō o taberu(ぶろうを食べる).” A foreign friend once told me that the Japanese word “daradara(だらだら)” is extremely difficult to pronounce correctly.

I had always wanted to learn how to pronounce and distinguish the three Spanish “pero s,” which all sound like simply “pero” when represented in Japanese. To achieve this, I asked Marcelo, a physical education teacher who worked with me at the Buenos Aires Japanese School, to help train me. Marcelo had previously worked at a Japanese high school and speaks both Japanese and Spanish fluently.

Our training began with listening practice. At first, all three words sounded exactly the same to me. However, after listening again and again, I gradually began to notice the differences. Eventually, I came to feel that the three words were completely distinct sounds. It was a very strange experience because I could no longer remember how they had originally all sounded identical to me. The next step was pronunciation. Once I could hear the differences, producing the sounds became much easier. After all, I simply had to listen and imitate. If you cannot hear a sound accurately, you cannot reproduce it accurately. But once you can hear it, you can say it.

The results of academic achievement surveys show that the students of Fuchu No. 8 Junior High School already possess strong English-speaking skills. As you continue studying English, why not pay special attention to pronunciation? Improving your pronunciation can greatly increase your confidence and motivation to communicate with others through conversation.

Principal

Yasuhiro Takashio



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第11号

令和8年10月1日

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府中第八中学校

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全校生徒数700名

〈在籍生徒数〉 一学年232名、二学年250名、三学年218名

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