

## ***Aizuchi* in Japanese Language Online Class: Lecturer-Student Interaction**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Aizuchi is more frequently used in modern Japanese conversation than any other language. As a result, proper aizuchi usage is a significant indicator of Japanese conversational ability. In recent years, online classes are a state of learning that must be implemented due to the pandemic that is sweeping the world. This research examines the application of the frequency and form of aizuchi in student and lecturer interactions in online classrooms. Given the increasing importance of distance communication skills in foreign language learning in the future, this is an attempt to communicate the cultural context of indigenous learners in a global environment. Additionally, this type of research on distance communication between foreign language learners makes critical recommendations for the future facilitation of distance language learning. This research is qualitative research with a descriptive method. The data is aizuchi sourced from student interaction with lecturers in virtual classes at the Japanese department, Universitas Sumatera Utara and Universitas Harapan Medan. Data collection uses the record and note method. Interactive data analysis was used in analyzing the data. The results indicate that students in Japanese online classes rarely use aizuchi. The forms of aizuchi used by students are tandokukei (singular) and kurikaeshikei (singular repetition). In conclusion, students use aizuchi very limitedly, which does not help keep communication smooth and ultimately results in a tendency to get stuck or misunderstood in online class interactions.*

***Keywords: Aizuchi; Online Class; Japanese***

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Due to the pandemic, online classes have become a viable option for implementing education globally. On the other hand, distance education presents a challenge to the world of education (Basar, 2021). Numerous critical aspects of distance learning skill development must be enhanced, including teacher or lecturer capability and practical interaction situations during the learning process. More precisely, difficulties are encountered when learning foreign languages, which

emphasizes the importance of two-way communication between teachers and students in the foreign language being studied.

In Japanese, there is *aizuchi* or better known as back-channel response. *Aizuchi* is a type of response from the previous speech, or it can be described as a brief response to the other person's speech in response to their speech. (Gapur et al., 2022; Sevira, 2018). In contrast to Indonesian communication culture, which tends to believe that listening to someone's words and not overreacting until the end of the speech is a sign of politeness, in Japanese communication culture, responding when someone speaks is a natural and natural thing.

*Aizuchi* in Japanese communication is an expression conveyed by the interlocutor to respond to the information conveyed by the speaker when the speaker is exercising his right to speak. *Aizuchi* is a Japanese word frequently used in everyday conversation to give the impression of being relaxed and not stiff so that the conversation can flow smoothly. Horiguchi (Khotimah, 2019) explains that the term "*aizuchishi*" in conversation indicates that the listener comprehended the speaker's utterance or was less interested in the speaker's utterance. This *aizuchi* vocabulary can be in the form of *ee*、*hai*、*un*、*sou desu ka*、*sou desu ne*、*hee*、*aa*、and so on. There are four kinds of *aizuchi* vocabulary based on the most frequently occurring *aizuchi*, namely: *tandokukei* (singular), *kurikaeshikei* (singular repetition of forms), *fukugoukei* (mixture of several singular forms), and *fukugoukurikaeshikei* (mixed singular repeated forms).

*Aizuchi* is used more frequently in Japanese than in any other language, according to numerous previous studies (Carpi, 2020; Clancy et al., 1996; Kawabata & Matsuka, 2021; Maynard, 1986; Saft, 2007), and is considered a "caring" behavior (Maynard, 1986). A simple extension of this idea is that "a high-frequency, non-monotonic variant leads to good communication (at least in Japanese):" in fact, *aizuchi* is often thought of as a way to measure a learner's proficiency in Japanese.

Naturally, studying Japanese at the university level in Indonesia aims to develop students' Japanese language skills. *Aizuchi*, a metric for Japanese language proficiency, has long been used in the classroom, most notably in conversational (*kaiwa*) and hearing (*choukai*) classes. However, it is necessary to understand how it is implemented in online classes.

Several studies have been conducted on *aizuchi* in the recent past, such as by (Dityandari & Aryanto, 2020; Lee, 2018; Yuniastuti & Nila Sepni, 2019), all of whom raised the topic of *aizuchi* in the form of data that was conveyed in direct face-to-face communication in Japanese or other languages for comparison. In contrast, this research analyzes the interaction speech through the

video conference application. This study also uses a qualitative approach that emphasizes real phenomena that occur in the data collection process and describes them. Therefore, this research continues previous research on *aizuchi* with different data sources.

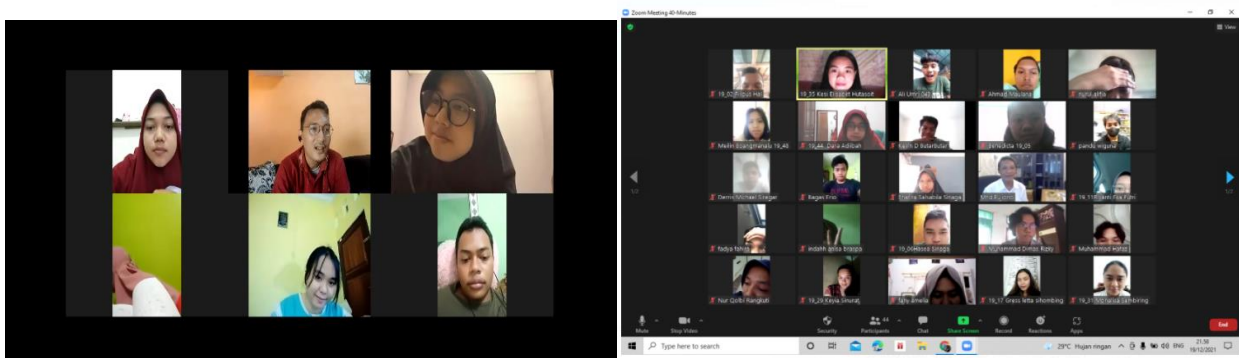
Numerous issues can arise when communicating via the Internet. In the case of a video call (video conference) between two people using a fixed screen (i.e., PC monitor, etc.), the critical role of the speaker's gaze in signaling when it is time to take a response or turn to speak is technically challenging to capture, and interaction is likely to break down (Carpi, 2020, p. 212). Numerous linguistic signals can be analyzed, including *aizuchi* and response delays. As such, this research examines the use of *aizuchi*'s frequency and form in online classroom interaction between students and lecturers.

There is a pressing need to identify the different naturalness-related issues encountered in Japanese online learning in the post-pandemic period that combines online and offline learning (hybrid learning). *Aizuchi*, as an indicator of naturalness in Japanese that is not adequately realized in learning, significantly affects student's capacity to construct natural dialogues. As a result, knowing the form and execution of *aizuchi* in online classrooms can assist teachers in preparing suitable online class teaching strategies.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

This research employs a qualitative-descriptive approach (Bungin, 2008; Moleong, 2014; Sugiyono, 2016), which is a research method that involves the collection of qualitative data and descriptive analysis. The analysis and description of data in the form of utterances from interactions in online classes were guided by formulating the research problem.

The research data consist of *aizuchi* and pauses from student interactions with lecturers during a conversation class meeting (*kaiwa*). The conversational subjects in question are courses offered to students in semester V (five) of the Japanese Language Study Program at Universitas Sumatera Utara and Universitas Harapan Medan in the 2021/2022 academic year (January-May 2022). It is because only these two universities in Medan offer Japanese majors. It is possible to say that the data gathering employed a purposive sampling method. In addition, the consideration for data collection relates to the notion of a qualitative approach that is not overly familiar with the population and sample, which means that researchers, as key instruments, operate carefully with their knowledge and intuition regarding phenomena (Bouma & Carland, 2016).



**Fig 1.** Screenshot of the conversation class recording.

The data is collected using the video recorder feature included in the Zoom Meetings application. The recording's results were then re-listened in order to obtain data in the form of *aizuchi*'s response. Additionally, responses are recorded and presented as questions and answers in a data table.

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) used an interactive model for data analysis, which entails condensing, presenting, and concluding. At the condensing stage, data were selected based on the research's criteria, specifically responses and pauses in Japanese speech. This is because it is undeniable that students occasionally respond to lecturers' questions in Bahasa Indonesia. As a result, the data used is solely *aizuchi*'s response in Japanese. Numerous variants of *aizuchi* are also selected by focusing on a single representative example. Additionally, the data are presented in tables and discussed, followed by conclusions that address the research problem formulation.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### Results

According to the data collected, students rarely use *aizuchi* in online class interactions. This is demonstrated by the data on *aizuchi* forms, which revealed seven and eight conversations, despite the lecture lasting approximately 60 minutes. Students in online classes use the terms *tandokukei* (singular) and *kurikaeshike* (singular repetition) to refer to *aizuchi*. The *aizuchi* forms are listed in a table, along with a note indicating whether or not there is a pause in the students' responses. This is because the pause is a component of natural language.

**Table 1.** The form of *aizuchi* used by Japanese students at the Universitas Sumatera Utara

| No | Interaction  |  | Notes               |
|----|--|--|---------------------|
|    | Lecturer   | Students   |                     |
| 1  | <i>Kyou wa futari kesseki desu ne</i><br>Today two people are not<br>present right?  | <i>Hai. A-san to B-San.</i><br>Yes. A and B  | There is a<br>pause |
| 2  | <i>Shukudai wa dou deshita ka.</i><br><br><i>how's the homework?</i>   | <i>Hai. Mou okurimashita.</i><br><br>Yes. It has been sent   | There is a<br>pause |
| 3  | <i>Konkai 81 peeji o hiraite<br/>kudasai ne.</i><br>This time, go to page 81.  | <i>Hai</i><br>Yes.   | Without pause       |
| 4  | <i>Sutekina fuku desu ne. doko de<br/>kattan desu ka.</i><br><br>It's a good dress. Where to buy?  | <i>ee.. depaato de</i><br><br>yes. at the Department store   | There is a<br>pause |
| 5  | <i>A-San, romaji o katakana ni<br/>kaeshitainn desu ga, dou<br/>sureba ii desu ka.</i><br><br>Mr. A, I want to change from<br>romaji to katakana, what<br>should I do? | <i>hai 。 Di klik pengaturan<br/>bahasanya sensei.</i><br><br>Yes Sensei, clicked on the<br>language settings.                                    | There is a<br>pause |
| 6  | <i>Onrain manga o yomitain desu<br/>ga, doko no website o mireba ii<br/>desu ka.</i><br><br>I want to read comics online, is<br>it better to see which website?        | <i>Onrainmanga desuk a. Eeto,<br/>mangagohan to iu webusaito de<br/>ii desu yo.</i><br><br>Online comic? I think<br>mangagohan's website is good | Without pause       |
| 7  | <i>Ashita eigakan de eiga o mitain<br/>desu ga, doko ni ikeba ii desu<br/>ka.</i><br><br>Tomorrow I want to watch a<br>movie at the cinema, where<br>should I go?      | <i>E? Eigakan desuka.<br/>Ikanakereba ii to omoimasuyo.<br/>Abunai desu kara</i><br><br>Ha? Cinema? Better not go.<br>Because of the danger      | Without pause       |
| 8  | <i>Koko made sitsumon wa<br/>arimasu ka. Wakarimasu<br/>ka.</i><br>Up here any questions? Do you<br>understand?  | <i>Hai, wakarimasu</i><br><br>Yes. I understand  | Without pause       |

**Table 2.** The form of *aizuchi* used by Japanese students at the Universitas Harapan

| No | Interaction   |  | Notes         |
|----|---|--|---------------|
|    | Lecturer  | Students   |               |
| 1  | <i>Kono mae no bunkasai<br/>wa dou deshita ka</i><br><br>How's the bunkasa? | <i>Sou desu ne. Omoshirokatta<br/>desuyo.</i><br><br>I see. Interesting. | Without pause |

|   |  |   |                  |
|---|--|---|------------------|
| 2 | <i>A-San wa mata kesseki desu ne, Daijoubbu ka na. korona uirusu desu ka.</i><br>Mr. A is not present anymore. Is he okay?<br>What is Covid?   | <i>Ee, wakarimasen sensei. Mungkin kena covid sensei.</i><br>Yes. I don't know sensei.<br>Maybe got covid.            | There is a pause |
| 3 | <i>Dewa 81 peeji o hiraite kudasai ne.</i><br>OK, please go to page 81   | <i>Hai.. 81 peeji</i><br>Yes.. page 81  | There is a pause |
| 4 | <i>Sutekina boushi desu ne. doko de kattan desu ka</i><br>That's a nice hat. Where to buy?   | <i>A, Arigatougozaimasu. Onrain de kaimashita.</i><br>Thank you. I buy online.  | There is a pause |
| 5 | <i>Sumimasen, megane wo kakenakereba, amari ji ga yomemasen. chotto megane o totte kimasune.</i><br>Sorry, if I don't wear glasses, I can't really read the letters. I'll take my glasses in a second. | <i>Sou desu ka. Hai sensei.</i><br>Oh, I see. Alright sensei.   | Without pause    |
|   | <i>Shuu matsu ni tomodachi to kyampu o shitain desuga, Dokoka ii tokoro arimasen ka</i><br>Weekend I want to camp with friends, is there not a good place?   | <i>Kyanpu desu ka.</i><br>Camping?  | There is a pause |
| 6 | <i>Konshuu no nichiyoubi tomodachi ga kekkon shimasuga, donna mono o agereba ii desu ka.</i><br>This Sunday my friend is getting married, what should I give him?                                      | <i>Kasih duit saja sensei. e... okane o...</i><br>Just give money sensei (in Bahasa Indonesia).<br>Hmm.. the money... | There is a pause |
| 7 | <i>Koko made sitsumon wa arimasu ka.</i><br>Wakarimasuka.<br>Up here any questions? do you understand?   | <i>Iie.. arimasen.</i><br>No. There is no.  | Without pause    |

### Singular *aizuchi* form (*tandokukei*)

Students learning Japanese online use the *aizuchi* form in the following conversation, which is a singular form.

#### Conversation 1.

- Lecturer: *Sumimasen, megane wo kakenakereba, amari ji ga yomemasen. chotto megane o totte kimasune.*  
Sorry, if I don't wear glasses, I can't really read the letters. I'll take my glasses in a second.
- Student: *Sou desu ka.* *Hai sensei.*  
Oh, I see. Alright sensei.

In conversation 1, students respond to the lecturer's speech by using “*sou desu ka.*” This response was said without pause because the students clearly understood the meaning conveyed by the lecturer who wanted to take glasses. This uninterrupted response occurs because students know the meaning of the lecturer's utterance and do not expect an answer in the form of a long sentence that requires students to think about answering. In contrast to the following example conversation.

#### Conversation 2.

- Lecturer : *Sutekina boushi desu ne. doko de kattan desu ka*  
That's a nice hat. Where to buy?
- Student : *A, arigatougozaimasu. (..pause..) Onrain de kaimashita.*  
**Oh, thank you. (..pause..) I bought online**

Students responded to conversation 2 above with a single *aizuchi* “*A, arigatougozaimasu.*” This is because the students are already familiar with the lecturer's speech extolling the virtues of his hat. However, the students paused briefly before continuing to say, “*Onrain de kaimashita.*” This is because the lecturer's question about where to purchase the hat requires students to consider the appropriate vocabulary when responding. Without *aizuchi*, the pause in students' thinking makes the conversation unnatural.

### ***Aizuchi* form repetition (*kurikaeshikei*)**

*Aizuchi* is a type of repetition used by students learning Japanese online. The repetition in question occurs when the listener repeat part or all of the speech of the speaker he has just heard. The form of complete repetition of the previous statement is limited to short statements. The following is an example of a conversation that took place.

#### Conversation 3.

- Lecturer : *Ashita eigakan de eiga o mitain desu ga, doko ni ikeba ii desu ka.*)  
Tomorrow I want to watch a movie at the cinema, where should I go?
- Student : ***E? Eigakan desu ka. Ikanakerba ii to omoimasu. Abunai desu kara***  
Ha? Cinema? Better not go. Because of the danger.

In conversation 3, students responded to the sentence “*E? Eigakan desu ka*” with *aizuchi* repetition. This is because students who intend to go to the movies already understand what their lecturer says. Students responded without pause by repeatedly repeating the word cinema. This confirmation question demonstrated that students responded positively to the lecturer's words and that the subsequent sentences remained related, namely suggesting that lecturers avoid going to the movies due to the dangers associated with the pandemic. The continuous response with appropriate *aizuchi*, as in conversation 3, lends a sense of naturalness to conversational interactions. The following is an example of another repetition of a conversation with *aizuchi*.

#### Conversation 4.

- Lecturer : *Dewa 81 peeji o hiraite kudasai ne.*  
Ok please go to page 81.
- Student : ***Hai.. 81 peeji***  
***Yes.. page 81***

In conversation 4, the lecturer instructed the students to open a page in the book, to which the students responded with *aizuchi* “*hai (はい)*” and repeated the page number that had been specified by the lecturer in the previous conversation.



### Pause in student response using *aizuchi*

There are numerous *aizuchi* response pauses in the online class interactions, which make conversational communication appear unnatural. This could be due to the internet connection, but the numerous repetitions throughout the interaction indicate that the primary reason is that students do not typically respond to conversations using *aizuchi* vocabulary. Some students appeared to nod their heads but remained silent, necessitating the lecturer to repeat the question two or three times. The following is an example of a conversation in which students respond with a pause.

#### Conversation 5.

|          |   |   |
|----------|---|---|
| Lecturer | : | <i>Shukudai wa dou deshita ka .</i><br>How's your homework?                                     |
| Student  | : | <.. <b>pause</b> ..> <i>Hai. Mou okurimashita.</i><br><.. <b>pause</b> ..> Yes. I've been sent. |

### The use of Bahasa Indonesia as the initial response

Another phenomenon observed in online classes for Japanese language students is students responding in Bahasa Indonesia to the lecturer's questions. *Aizuchi* was delivered without pause in Bahasa Indonesia, but there was a pause when the students attempted to explain again in Japanese. This is because students believe that the appropriate vocabulary should be translated and delivered to them in order to respond. As a result of their limited vocabulary and unusual usage, *aizuchi* students' natural responses come out in their mother tongue (Bahasa Indonesia). Here is an example of that exchange.

#### Conversation 6

|          |   |  |
|----------|---|--|
| Lecturer | : | <i>Konshuu no nichiyoubi tomodachi ga kekkon shimasuga, donna mono o agereba ii desu ka</i><br>This Sunday my friend is getting married, what should I give him?       |
| Student  | : | <u><i>Ya.. Kasih duit aja sensei.</i></u><br>(.. <b>pause</b> ..) ( <i>ee.. okane o..</i> )<br><br>Just give money sensei (in Bahasa Indonesia).<br>Hmm.. the money... |

It was discovered that students used *aizuchi* in Japanese to respond to the lecturer's questions, but then used Bahasa Indonesia to respond to questions that demanded explanations, in contrast to the findings from conversation 6. As in the following exchange of words.

#### Conversation 7

- Lecturer : *A-San wa mata kesseki desu ne, Daijoubbu ka na. korona uirusu desu ka.*  
Mr. A is not present anymore. Is he okay? What is Covid?  
Student : *ee. wakarimasen sensei. Mungkin kena covid sensei*  
Yes. I don't know sensei. Maybe got covid sensei

Students spontaneously responded with *aizuchi* “*ee, wakarimasen*,” but the next response is in Bahasa Indonesia. *Aizuchi*'s initial response gave the impression of natural interaction, but the subsequent mixing of Bahasa Indonesia codes obliterated the natural impression *aizuchi* created at the outset.

As a result, the importance of *aizuchi* must be accompanied by a consistent use of Japanese vocabulary and the suitability of *aizuchi* in conjunction with pauses and response responses in order to create a natural conversational interaction.

#### Discussion

In the category of brief speech, *Aizuchi* serves as a signal of comprehension and confirmation. This is demonstrated by the data's illustrative examples (Conversations 3 & 4). Students recite the questions posed by the lecturer to demonstrate that they heard and comprehended the lecturer's remarks. This is consistent with Dityandari's (2020) conclusion that *aizuchi* functions as a signal of comprehension.

Alternatively, *aizuchi* in online class interactions does not always indicate comprehension but rather the speaker's desire to continue communication despite not fully comprehending the question. Conversation 1 demonstrates that students only respond with *sou desu ne*, as do the pauses in conversation 6. This is consistent with the findings of Kawabata (2021), who explains that *aizuchi* frequently occurs when the main speaker introduces an object familiar to the non-main speaker. Conversation as anticipated It is also suggested that the presence or absence of *aizuchi* is not always a clear indicator that the non-primary speaker knows the target object but that it is crude but useful information for predicting the knowledge level of the non-primary speaker.

In addition, the majority of online class conversations adhere to a consistent pattern. Across the data, it was observed that unnatural responses led to misunderstandings and hindered the flow of conversation. The first quote describes a situation in which the learner only uses *aizuchi* monotone (e.g., "hai, hai"), allowing the conversation to continue regardless of the learner's comprehension.

On the other hand, students also demonstrate communication that relies primarily on facial expressions and rarely uses *aizuchi*. When a lengthy "pause" is taken before responding to the interlocutor, the conversation becomes stalled, and misunderstandings occur.

In most dialogues, the final particle (*suujoshi*) is seldom employed. Because *aizuchi*'s time to convey "don't understand" in Japanese is typically longer than those expressing "agreement" and/or "neutrality," the speaker must be careful not to delay too much *aizuchi* time in video conversations where time delays occur and where misunderstandings frequently result from an inappropriate "pause." As previous research has demonstrated, despite what has been stated above, the impact of using technological devices such as Internet-connected video cameras, which occasionally report transmission delays, must be considered when conducting these types of experiments and analyses.

There is very little use of *aizuchi*, a reliance on the speaker's gaze rather than speech, especially in situations where the learner's Japanese proficiency is low, as well as the impact of time spent in discussion and the duration of pauses. The most recent research on long-distance communication between students and teachers has uncovered several questions that need to be pondered by teachers who want to assist in facilitating communication and resolving misunderstandings that arise between students participating in online exchanges. When it comes to learning Japanese, it is essential to point out that a lack of awareness of the complicated link between *aizuchi* and quiet or pause as two sides of the same coin for Japanese listeners can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings between cultures. Even if students had previously lived in Japan for a short period or for an extended period, the results of this study showed that exposure to the Aizuchi language and ma(pause) Japanese distance learning classroom online interactions do not appear to be sufficient conditions for being able to use *aizuchi* effectively. This suggests that teachers may need to emphasize the use of *aizuchi* (as well as other sentence-ending particles) in their classroom instruction.

## CONCLUSION

The naturalness of Japanese interaction through *aizuchi* is something that should be considered when learning, particularly online learning. According to the research's findings,

students used *aizuchi* in a limited number of ways, hampered communication, and eventually resulted in a tendency to become stuck or misunderstood during online class interactions. Aspects that need to be considered in applying *aizuchi* in online classes are response delays, suitability, and consistency of vocabulary used in responding. All of this is closely related and influenced by the communication habits of Japanese people, which are different from Bahasa Indonesia. For this reason, it is necessary to focus on training with an approach to the habituation of Japanese society's communication culture.

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