

Teaching English Pronunciation¹

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Abstract

Intelligible English pronunciation is an essential skill to use this language as a means of communication, but for years many Japanese students have failed to learn this properly, irrespective of nationwide major changes in teaching methods. This paper identifies major problems with English pronunciation among Japanese learners in four principal areas (vowels, consonants, connected speech and prosody) and gives some useful suggestions to teaching them, including those presented in the phonetic course at UCL in 2006.

0. Introduction

It has been more than ten years since Japan shifted its English teaching in school from the grammar-translation method to the communicative method. This change was made to improve the deplorable situation of English teaching in Japan where many students could not say even simple sentences in English after six or eight years of learning in school. Since this change, accuracy has lost its past grand status and fluency has taken over in its place. English grammar is not being taught in nearly as much detail as when I was a student.

In spite of teaching English under the communicative method, however, it seems that many learners have not improved their speaking ability, not to mention their English pronunciation. This may be partly related to entrance examinations, in which no speaking test is required except for English-oriented departments. In contrast, I hear from some university professors that their students' listening comprehension abilities have improved recently. They say that this is related to learners' efforts to prepare for the listening comprehension test included in the Center Examination.

Intelligible English pronunciation is a basic and essential skill required for those who want to use

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English communicatively. This paper identifies major problems that many Japanese learners have with their English pronunciation and presents some useful suggestions. Where relevant, it also reports how English pronunciation is taught to non-native speakers of English at a major university in the UK.²

1. Vowels

Standard Japanese has only five vowel phonemes, while BBC pronunciation³ has 20 and GA has 17.⁴ The difference is three to four times in scale, which is undoubtedly very large. It is natural that many Japanese learners of English have great difficulty in pronouncing English phonemes correctly and that they replace English vowel phonemes with Japanese counterparts in many cases. I noticed in some of my recent classes that many students could not pronounce 'barn' and 'burn' correctly. They pronounced the two vowel phonemes identically, replacing them with the Japanese /a/ phoneme. No roticity was used. These two vowel phonemes are completely distinct to native speakers and learners need to pronounce them correctly in order to use English communicatively. It may be better for learners to use one type of accent (e.g. BBC pronunciation or GA) in speech, but this is not a big problem. Intelligibility is the key word. There are three stages that learners need to follow. First, they must perceive qualitative differences between the two vowel phonemes. Second, they need to learn how to move their jaw and tongue properly to pronounce them. It would be helpful if they have fundamental knowledge of English phonetics. They may pronounce them with roticity or not, but non-roticity seems to be easier for them though they have been exposed more to GA in school. Third, minimal pair drills should be introduced. This practice is mechanical and may be boring, but it helps learners to pronounce them well and even unconsciously. In the course at UCL, a small booklet was given to all participants, which involved many minimal pair drills.

One drawback about the course was that no practical classes were available to learn GA. Some major differences between GA and BBC pronunciation were only mentioned in a lecture. In Japan, GA is the de facto standard, judging from the MEXT-approved English textbooks, accompanying audio materials, and the listening comprehension test administered in the Center Examination for the past two years. Teachers will need to modify what they have learned in the course to make it applicable to teaching English in Japan. It seems, however, that the MEXT adopts a different policy

² This part of report is based on my experience of participating in an English phonetic course at University College London, August 7-18, 2006. 135 participants, who spoke 19 different first languages, were divided into 13 groups according to their careers and knowledge of English phonetics. The course was made up of lectures and practical courses including ear training.

³ Some still prefer RP, but Roach (2000) states that it is 'old-fashioned and misleading'. This paper uses 'BBC pronunciation', which is selected as a preferred name in this book.

⁴ There are different views of the English phonemic system, especially in GA.

in recruiting ALTs. They come not only from the US but also from other English-speaking countries. As a result, students may be exposed to two different types of English accent in class. I hear that many teachers are perplexed about this situation. The current policy should be reformed as soon as possible. I take the view that in teaching listening comprehension, various English accents should be taught step by step, but in teaching English pronunciation, one single accent is enough until learners master it reasonably well.

The English vowel phonemes are as follows: / ɪ, e, æ, ʌ, ɒ, ʊ, i:, ɑ:, ɔ:, u:, ɜ:, eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ, əʊ, aʊ, iə, eə, ʊə, ə / in BBC pronunciation and / ɪ, e, æ, ʌ, ʊ, i:, ɑ:, ɔ:, u:, ɜ:, eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ, oʊ, aʊ, ə, ɚ / in GA. The symbols presented here are of the quantitative-qualitative approach. In the MEXT-approved textbooks, however, the quantitative approach is still used, though many English-Japanese dictionaries have switched to the quantitative-qualitative approach. The phonetic symbols used in those textbooks should be modified as soon as possible. Among the symbols presented above, / ɪ, ʊ, i:, u: / are especially useful to represent the importance of qualitative differences as in ‘peak’ and ‘pig’ under pre-fortis clipping. There are five major differences between BBC pronunciation and GA. First, the central vowel is /r/-colored in GA, but not in BBC pronunciation (e.g. ‘turn’). Second, the /r/-colored schwa is used in GA (e.g. ‘Peter’). Third, there is no /ɒ/ in GA, and it is replaced with /ɑ:/ (e.g. ‘stop’). Fourth, the starting point of ‘Oh’ is different. Fifth, there are no centering diphthongs in GA. There are some symbols used in common between the two accents, but at least three of them are not phonetically identical. First, /ɔ:/ is opener and may also be replaced with /ɑ:/ in GA. Second, /ʌ/ is more central in GA. Third, /æ/ becomes closer in GA but opener in BBC pronunciation.⁵ In Japan, the GA vowel phonemes of ‘year’, ‘fair’ and ‘tour’ are usually interpreted as diphthongs, but they should be treated as a monophthong plus /r/ (Cruttenden 2001, Ladefoged 2006).⁶ They may be interpreted as phonetically diphthongs, but it is phonemes, not allophones that are used in dictionaries. Since there are many more vowel phonemes in English than in Japanese, it is advisable to classify them into traditional vowel sets (short vowels, long vowels and diphthongs) and teach them per set, with those symbols. The Japanese kana is not sufficient. In addition to the phonemes, two non-phonemic symbols [i, u]⁷ are adopted to transcribe neutralization, as in ‘happy’ and ‘thank you’.

GA is basically taught in Japan, but it seems that many learners do not learn this accent well enough. For example, they do not use rhoticity and they pronounce the vowel of ‘hot’ and the strong vowel of ‘father’ differently. Lack of rhoticity may be linked to their native language accent, and

5 Some GA speakers use /e/ (e.g. ‘flax’) or /eə/ (e.g. ‘dance’) instead of /æ/.

6 It is not easy to decide how these monophthongs should be transcribed because they are neutralized by the effect of the post-vocalic /r/. For example, ‘year’ can be technically transcribed as /jɪr/ or /jɪr/, but for parallel transcription with BBC pronunciation, /jɪr/ is preferred.

7 In practice, they are usually transcribed in phonemic system for convenience and simplicity.

spelling pronunciation may be the cause of the two unnecessary realizations of a single GA phoneme /ɑ:/. These are features of BBC pronunciation. It seems, in this sense, that BBC pronunciation is more suitable to Japanese learners of English as a model for speaking.

Weak forms also need to be taught well. In English, syllables are alternately stressed and unstressed to construct rhythm like a machine gun or a drumbeat. In Japanese, the basic unit is moras, each of which is phonologically identical in duration. For example, in 'Daniel Jones is in the laboratory', the second syllable of 'Daniel', 'is', 'in', 'the', the first, third, fourth and fifth syllables of 'laboratory' are pronounced in weak form,⁸ but many Japanese learners fail to do so. They use their native language rhythm in English and pronounce all the syllables in equal duration. As a result, their English sounds monotonous and uninteresting. All strong form pronunciations like this may not be a problem in communication if this rhythm is considered simply nonstandard. In fact, however, this may cause unexpected misunderstandings on the part of listeners. 'Daniel Jones' may be interpreted as 'Dannie L. Jones' and 'laboratory' as 'Lab Oratory', 'Lab Aura Tory' or 'Labour or Tory'.⁹ This is not a laughing matter. It creates a serious communication problem. Weak forms must be properly used for successful communication.

2. Consonants

Unlike the vowel systems, the consonant system presented in Japan's English teaching is not problematic. All of the twenty-four consonant phonemes are presented and classified well. In the course at UCL, three consonant phonemes were classified as post-alveolar: /r, tr, dr/. Usually only the /r/ is its constituent. Whether the last two should be included is debatable. This classification reflects Wells's idea of syllabification (Wells 1990). He syllabifies 'petrol' between 'r' and 'o' while others like Roach et al. (2006) between 't' and 'r'. Palato-alveolar may be used interchangeably with post-alveolar, as in Roach (2000), where /ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ, r/ are palato-alveolar or post-alveolar. In the course, however, the first four phonemes were classified distinctly as palato-alveolar. To Japanese learners, simpler classification would suffice and may be more adequate. The four English approximants /l, r, j, w/ were divided into two groups in the course: the first two as liquids and the last two as semivowels. Basically, consonant phonemes are easier to learn and teach than vowel phonemes because the point of articulation and the manner of articulation can be clearly described. In addition, voicing is also an important factor in classifying the English consonant phonemes. Learners must keep in mind that voiced consonant phonemes are not always voiced, for example, in

8 The description is based on BBC pronunciation, in which the schwa in the fourth syllable may also be elided. In GA, however, the vowel in this syllable is a strong vowel, which is never elided.

9 See Lewis, J. W.'s web page at <http://www.yek.me.uk/> for more information.

word-initial or word-final positions. In this sense, *lenis* and *fortis* may be more adequate terms.

There are many more consonant phonemes in English than in Japanese, and for Japanese learners' English pronunciation to become more intelligible, it is necessary to practice pronouncing them accurately and clearly, with ear training and repetition. Some English consonant phonemes are difficult to distinguish for Japanese learners: /b, v/, /f, h/, /θ, s/, /ð, z/, /ʒ, dʒ/ and /l, r/, not to mention syllable-final /m, n, ŋ/, and learners must spend much time practicing pronouncing them well. Minimal pair drills are also very helpful for this purpose. One lecture handout given in the course stated that Japanese learners tend to pronounce a voiceless obstruent in final position as germinated. No reason was mentioned, but it is obvious that Japanese 'double consonant' pronunciation is the cause. It shows how difficult it is to get rid of L1 phonological features in speaking L2. Many Japanese learners are unaware of phonetic differences in the Japanese consonant system. For example, they do not know the fact that the consonant of the Japanese /si/ is different from the other four consonants in the /sa/ column. Although this Japanese consonant is phonetically the voiceless alveolo-palatal fricative [ç], this fact may help them to be more sensitive to the difference between the voiceless alveolar fricative and the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative. In the same way, it is worth telling them that they unconsciously use the three English nasals in Japanese as allophones.

The glottal stop is not a phoneme in English, but it is frequently used as an allophone of /t/. The final 't' in 'that pen', for example, can be pronounced /t/ /p/ or [ʔ], though the first variant may be less heard in conversation. It is advisable to practice pronouncing the glottal stop, because recently native speakers use it more often. The glottal replacement never happens after an obstruent, as in 'next month'.

There seems to be some serious misconceptions about English plosive phonemes among Japanese learners. I came across the following statements in textbooks published in Japan. "In germinated consonants, the first consonant disappears, as in 'take care' and 'sit down'. A word-final plosive disappears, as in 'job' and 'ride'." These statements are misleading. The plosives consist of three stages: approach, hold and release. What is happening in 'take care' is a long hold with no release of the final /k/ and no approach of the initial /k/. In 'sit down', the release of the final /t/ is masked by the hold of the initial /d/. In both cases, the third stage is omitted. It seems that without this stage, many Japanese learners cannot perceive the presence of plosives. For native speakers, the presence of the final /d/ in 'ride', whether released or not, is completely different from the loss of it.¹⁰ They can easily perceive this consonant phoneme without the third stage. This sort of

¹⁰ I have heard an amazing recording made in Japan, where the word-final plosive is completely missing in such words I listed. The intention of doing this on the part of the production side may have been to make unreleased stops more obvious to Japanese learners, but this treatment is entirely wrong. It just increases misconceptions about English plosives.

perception must be learned to make communication in English go smoothly. In a practical class at UCL, the instructor pronounced ‘hike’, ‘hype’, ‘height’ and ‘hide’ in sequence and the participants had to write them down. The instructor did not release the final plosives, which made this exercise harder. This type of exercise is useful to help learners become more sensitive to word-final plosives.

In English, the onset occupies maximally three consonant phonemes and the coda, four,¹¹ but Japanese learners tend to avoid consonant cluster by inserting vowels to unconsciously construct Japanese mora-type rhythm. For example, ‘strike’ is a single syllable, but is reorganized into five moras, the original diphthong being split into a two-vowel sequence. This bad habit must be eliminated if communicative English is the goal. In English, the schwa is optional in many environments, such as ‘-tion’. I think in such environments Japanese students should try to learn the non-schwa form with a syllabic consonant as a model for three reasons. First, they tend to use a strong form. Second, this helps them to avoid unnecessary epenthetic vowels. Third, this form is descriptively more standard pronunciation. In the same way, the syllabic consonant should also be used in words like ‘hidden’ and ‘little’. To prevent learners from using incorrect strong forms, teaching compressed forms may also be effective, as in ‘family’.

If geographical and/or socio-economic varieties in English pronunciation are taken into account, many English phonemes, both vowels and consonants, are realized more differently than Japanese learners can imagine. The /eɪ/ phoneme may be monophthongal. The contrast between /ɑ:/ and /ɔ:/ may be lost. The /h/ phoneme may be dropped, ‘harm’ becoming homophonous with ‘arm’. One of the most striking changes may be made in the dental fricatives. They are typologically rare phonemes and even some native speakers do not use them. The phonemes may change into the labio-dental fricatives (fronting), the alveolar plosives (stopping), or the alveolar fricatives (sibilation). These allophonic differences may be necessary information for advanced learners, especially those who aim at working internationally.

In learning GA, the /t/ phoneme needs much attention. It is usually deleted after /n/, as in ‘twenty’ and ‘Internet’. ‘Planting’ becomes homophonous with ‘planning’. A more tricky case is /t/ voicing. ‘Atom’ becomes homophonous with ‘Adam’; ‘writer’ with ‘rider’; ‘latter’ with ‘ladder’. There was an interesting story reported in *Private Eye*, which stated: ‘The White House described the Democratic Iraq withdrawal proposals as being “aimed at bringing comity to their internal politics”, not comedy as stated in an article on March 9. The word comedy was taken from the original White House transcript which was corrected after we had gone to press.’¹² To keep terrible incidents like this from happening, proper care must be taken in the use of /t/ voicing. It may be

11 More consonants can get together at word boundary. ‘Next stop’ has five consonants in sequence. But this phonological input is realized differently as an output under elision in order to avoid a long consonant sequence.

12 This is quoted from Wells, J. C.’s web page at <http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/wells/>.

advisable for Japanese learners to always pronounce / t / as voiceless. The / t / phoneme may be replaced with the glottal stop, as in ‘that car’, but Japanese learners should not apply the glottal replacement to words like ‘better’ or ‘letter’, unless they can use it properly according to the situation.

Roach (2000) states that there are two cases in which phonetic facts are not reflected in a phonemic analysis. The first is the voiceless labial-velar fricative. Some people, including GA speakers, use this phoneme to pronounce words like ‘what’ at a prevocalic position, and it is transcribed as / hw /. Phonetically, however, there is no glottal fricative in this sound. The second is the voiceless palatal fricative. This phoneme is not used in the English phonological system. ‘Huge’, for example, is transcribed as / hju:dʒ /, but phonetically there is no / h / in this sound. These two cases of transcription must be taught carefully.

To be more sensitive to English phonemes, it may be necessary for learners to be able to transcribe in phonetic symbols what they hear. To make lexical knowledge irrelevant, nonsense words are more useful. Two of the examples that I heard in my ear training courses were / di'kreɪvələtɪŋ / and / ə,kɔ:ɾɪk'sæɾmənt /. Such examples should not violate the English phonotactic constraints, though this makes this exercise less interesting, by reducing the number of possible combinations of phonemes.

3. Connected speech

Learning phonemes is not enough to use English communicatively. Some phonemes may undergo phonetic changes in connected speech, especially across words. They may be elided, assimilated or linked. These changes do not happen at random. Learners need to keep these rule-governed changes in mind and be able to unconsciously apply them in similar environments at all times.

The alveolar stop, both voiced and voiceless, is subject to elision when it is medial in a cluster of three consonants. Elision takes place within words (e.g. ‘exactly’, ‘mostly’ and ‘friendship’) and across words (e.g. ‘soft voice’, ‘last chance’ and ‘hold tight’). Because of elision, ‘like them’ may be homophonous with ‘liked them’. The difference in tense may depend on the context or on the presence of a slight pause instead of the elided voiceless alveolar stop. The voiceless alveolar stop in words like ‘doesn’t’ and ‘haven’t’ is also subject to elision. Weak vowels / ə, ɪ / can also be elided, as in ‘correct’ and ‘difficult’. In words like ‘camera’, not only may the schwa be elided, but the syllabic / r / may lose its syllabicity and the word may become bi-syllabic. Contrary to elision, another phoneme may be added. The voiceless alveolar stop may be inserted between the alveolar nasal and the voiceless alveolar fricative (e.g. ‘sense’), and between the alveolar nasal and the

voiceless palato-alveolar fricative (e.g. 'attention'). The voiceless bilabial stop may be inserted between the bilabial nasal and the voiceless labio-dental fricative (e.g. 'comfort'). Elision should be taught well to Japanese learners, as this will help them to avoid unnecessary vowel insertion. Care must be taken to help them to understand well the difference between elision of the alveolar stops and unreleased stops. The insertion of the optional /t, p/ may be especially useful for advanced learners.

Assimilation also often happens in connected speech. Native speakers are usually unaware of this process. Japanese people, in general, are unaware of palatalization of /s, z/ before the Japanese phoneme /i/ and the four different realizations of the Japanese phoneme /n/. Assimilation is a natural process in language. It makes it easier for native speakers to pronounce some phonemes in their language. In learning English, however, Japanese students must learn English assimilation rules because due to the lack of adequate spoken input, they tend to pronounce English words according to spelling or else precisely according to phonetic symbols transcribed in dictionaries. Assimilation is divided into three groups: progressive, regressive and coalescent. Very common is progressive assimilation in point of articulation. For example, the alveolar plosives become the bilabial plosives before the bilabials (e.g. 'that pen') and the velar plosives before the velar plosives (e.g. 'good concert'), where voicing is intact. This de-alveolarization is useful information to make the learners' English sound more natural. Interestingly, many Japanese learners are familiar with coalescent assimilation, where the alveolar plosive plus the palatal approximant becomes the palato-alveolar affricate (e.g. 'did you'). Another type of assimilation that is well taught is regressive assimilation in voicing (e.g. 'have to').

Linking is also something that Japanese learners are not accustomed to. They tend to pronounce English word by word. 'Get up' is usually pronounced *[getoapu]. As can be seen from this example, another cause of preventing normal linking from happening may be unnecessary epenthetic vowels, which must by all means be eliminated. In BBC pronunciation, linking /r/ is also an important item to teach (e.g. 'four eggs'). Intrusive /r/ may not have to be taught as something to be avoided any more (e.g. 'media event').

To become more familiar with what happens in connected speech, reading English aloud in phonetic symbols is also helpful. In my practical classes, one instructor showed us conversation clips written in phonetic symbols and told us to read them aloud. One example is [mɔ: ðəm 'wʌm 'mɪjəm 'məʊbəl 'fəʊnz əv bɪn 'i:pɪm bəɪ 'dɒgz]. It may not be easy to read, but this exercise is definitely useful to get used to English sound changes.

4. Prosody

Stress, rhythm and intonation are important prosodic properties, and controlling them properly is helpful in making the learners' English sound more natural and is also useful in preventing unexpected misunderstandings from happening. English rhythm is like a machine gun or a drumbeat. The key part is strong syllables and it is no exaggeration to say that weak syllables simply fill the gaps in between. Unless weak syllables are pronounced weakly, English rhythm collapses. Many Japanese learners use Japanese rhythm unconsciously and speak or read English in this rhythm, which does not sound like English at all. Reading nursery rhymes, limericks or poems aloud may be useful to learn English rhythm. One example of limericks is:

'A teacher called Steven from Leeds
Eats each meal with a teaspoon of seeds
Lilies cling to his skin
Thickets spring from his chin
And his knees are in leaf with green weeds.'¹³

This limerick is principally devoted to learn the FLEECE vowel and the KIT vowel, but is also useful to learn English rhythm.

Stress is especially important in grammatical units larger than single words to make their meaning clear. Incorrect stress placement may lead to misunderstandings. I have heard from an English man this episode of miscommunication in the US. He went there for the first time when he was in high school and wanted to buy ice cream. He pronounced this compound by placing primary stress on the second word, but failed to make himself understood. 'Ice cream' takes primary stress on the second syllable in BBC pronunciation, but on the first syllable in GA. He may have sounded like 'I scream'. Different stress placement is also useful in distinguishing compounds from noun phrases, as in 'German ,teacher' (meaning 'teacher of German') and ',German 'teacher' (meaning 'teacher from Germany'). As they show, primary stress is in principle placed on the first word in compounds and on the second word in noun phrases. Knowing correct stress placement is also essential for placing the nucleus at the right syllable in intonation. What is troublesome for non-native speakers of English is that there are some exceptions. Compounds such as 'Christmas Day' takes stress pattern as if it were a noun phrase. Learners must memorize them one by one. Stress placement also differs according to parts of speech in bi-syllabic words. When they are used as a noun, they take primary stress on the first syllable, but when they are used as a verb, it is the on the

¹³ See Lewis, J. W.'s web page at <http://www.yek.me.uk/> for more information.

second syllable that primary stress falls. Words like ‘increase’ and ‘record’ must be pronounced carefully, though some native speakers may sometimes violate this rule. It is also important to learn that stressed syllables can be downgraded. ‘New green silk’, for example, is pronounced underlyingly ‘new ‘green ‘silk’, but is usually pronounced ‘‘new green ‘silk’ by downgrading the second stressed syllable.¹⁴ This information is also important in placing the nucleus at the right syllable.

Intonation in English is a rather difficult area in pronunciation teaching. There are no unified notations. But one serious problem in Japan is that intonation has not been well taught. In most cases, learners are simply told to follow the model of native speakers or audio materials, but this is not a logical and systematic way of teaching. As a theoretical background, I strongly recommend the British approach because this is icon-based and is learner-friendly. An utterance consists of one or more intonational phrases (IPs).¹⁵ Each IP has a special syllable called the nucleus¹⁶, which functions as the center of pitch movement in each IP. This pitch movement is called the nuclear tone. Intonation is a sequence of IPs. In a monosyllabic utterance, like ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, the pitch movement is naturally completed in this syllable. When there are syllables after the nucleus, the pitch movement is completed at the end of the IP, but the major pitch movement is usually perceived on the nucleus. When pitch goes up, however, there is no noticeable pitch movement in the nucleus. The rise happens near the end of the IP. In such a case, the nucleus works simply as a starting point of this tone in the IP.

The IP is made up of four constituents: pre-head, head, nucleus and tail. Only the nucleus is obligatory. The head extends from the first accented syllable in an IP up to but not including the nucleus. The pre-head contains any unaccented syllables at the beginning of an IP. The tail means all syllables following the nucleus within a given IP. As seen above, when a tail follows the nucleus, the nuclear tone is completed at the end of the tail. The pre-head and the head are irrelevant to the nuclear tone. Roach (2000), for example, classifies the nuclear tones into five categories: fall, rise, rise-fall, fall-rise and level. In this course, however, both a fall and a rise were subdivided into high and low versions, and thereby the nuclear tones were divided into seven: high fall, low fall, rise-fall, low rise, high rise, fall-rise and mid level. The pre-head was divided into low and high versions. The classification of the head was more complicated. It was divided into four categories: high, falling, rising and low. An emphatic head was subcategorized into three groups: stepping, climbing and sliding. Roach (2000) classifies both pre-head and head into low and high versions only. A note

14 Wells calls this feature ‘Rule of Three’. See Wells (2006) for more information.

15 There are other terms for this. According to Cruttenden (1997), they are intonation-groups, sense-groups, breath-groups, tone-groups, tone-units, phonological phrases, and phonological clauses.

16 Another term is the tonic syllable.

should be added not to cause misunderstandings in terminology. Roach (2000) states that when there is more than one stressed syllable in the head, those syllables in the high head ‘step downwards progressively’. This form exactly matches the falling head. What Roach (2000) classifies as the low head includes both the rising head and the low head described in the course. The rising head is closely connected with a fall. The starting point of this tone naturally needs to be high, and if the onset of the head is low, there should be a progressive step-up in the head. In other words, the rising head does not have to be classified separately. In the same way, when a high head is followed by a fall, especially a high fall, accented syllables in the head do not have to step down progressively. This means that a high head does not have to be subdivided as stated in the course. The classification given in Roach (2000) is more straightforward and better for learners. The stepping head may be regarded as part of the high head, but I wonder if the climbing head and the sliding head are worth learning for non-native speakers. One instructor used a different system of transcribing English intonation. He listed five chief tones: alt, rise, fall, slump and climb. More common terms are high level, low rise, high fall, low fall and high rise, respectively. Complex tones are transcribed in a combination of two of the terms. Fall-rise, for example, is transcribed as fall and rise: / ˘m /, not the usual / ˘m /.

Inappropriate use of intonation may cause unexpected misunderstandings. Some interesting examples were given in the course. Instead of ‘No ˌthank you¹⁷, which is neutral, ‘No ˌthank you¹⁸ sounds unpleasant. The difference is simply at the head. Another example was ‘How many times do I have to ˌtell you’. This utterance sounds neutral with a high head, but grumpy with a low head. A low head needs to be used with care. Different choices of tone type can also change the meaning of utterances. In ‘I’ve got tea, or coffee, or lemonade’, if the last word (or to be more precise, its third syllable) is spoken with a fall, it means there is no more choice, but if it is spoken with a rise, it means that there may be more choices. In ‘He took the test last week and passed’, if the speaker wants to show how amazed s/he is, s/he has to say ‘passed’ with a high fall. In ‘Good day’, if ‘day’ is pronounced with a high fall, not the expected low rise, it sounds like an unfriendly dismissal.

Learners may find it relatively easy to pronounce any nuclear tone given here if an IP consists of the nucleus only or the nucleus and a tail. However, when there is a relatively longer sequence of syllables before the nucleus, as in ‘But ‘couldn’t we ‘leave it till Friday¹⁹, learners may not be able to read the sentence aloud well enough. In particular, Japanese learners tend to say words weakly near

17 The nucleus is underlined and immediately before this underlined syllable the tone mark is described, here as a low rise. The small raised vertical line indicates an accented syllable in a high head.

18 The small vertical line indicates an accented syllable in a low head.

19 The use of raised vertical lines after the onset conforms to transcription in Roach (2000).

the end of sentences, with the result being that the nucleus may not be pronounced as clearly as it should be. One instructor suggested that they begin with the nuclear tone and that pre-nuclear syllables be added little by little: ‘\Friday’, ‘leave it till \Friday’, ‘couldn’t we leave it till \Friday’ and ‘But couldn’t we leave it till \Friday’. This is a useful idea for production practice. In recognition practice, many exercises were given in which we had to mark the location of the nucleus and to identify tone patterns. In most cases, orthographic transcriptions were distributed and participants only had to check the location and/or the type of the nucleus. In some cases, segments also had to be transcribed in phonetic symbols. One example is [ə \nju:zpeɪpər | ɪz 'prɪntɪd ɪm /blæk | ɒm 'peɪpə ðæʔs /waɪt | ən `ðen ɪʔ geʔs /red | 'raɪʔ \θru:]. It is certain that this is one of the most difficult exercises in English phonetics, but it definitely helps learners to speak and understand English well. In teaching pronunciation, production practice should go hand in hand with recognition practice.

5. Concluding Remarks

This paper briefly identified principal problems with English pronunciation among Japanese learners and presented some useful suggestions to deal with them in four major areas: vowels, consonants, connected speech and prosody. It also explained some mechanisms of English pronunciation and some competing phonological theories. In Japan, GA is the de facto target, but teaching GA vowel phonemes is not easy because the way of transcribing them varies considerably. Besides this, in Japan more complicated systems are adopted to describe this accent. I believe that what I presented here is more straightforward and easier to understand for learners. This also matches native speakers’ intuition.

Japanese learners have been making the same errors in English pronunciation for years; such as epenthetic vowels, replacement of English phonemes with Japanese counterparts, extensive use of Japanese mora-timed rhythm, and unclear pronunciation at the end of sentences, the last of which prevents the nucleus from being used properly. In writing English, Japanese learners tend to take great care in grammar and usage, but in speaking it, they do not seem to worry so much about how they sound to their listeners. This unacceptable attitude toward English should be changed.

If learners simply want to be able to speak basic English for foreign travel, it does not matter whether they speak English with a strong Japanese accent. However, if they want to use English in any formal and/or international setting, they should speak it with intelligible pronunciation, good rhythm and intonation, and with grammatical and lexical accuracy. Good speaking style is helpful in communication in many respects. To improve English pronunciation, continuous production and

recognition practice is indispensable. This practice will be more effective when backed up by fundamental knowledge of English phonetics. Getting rid of unwanted L1 habits is not an easy task, but I strongly believe that this is attainable at a high level if enthusiastic teachers and hard-working learners cooperate together.

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