

Segmental and Suprasegmental Pronunciation Patterns of Japanese Learners of English

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Abstract

This study analyzes the pronunciation patterns of two Japanese learners of English by investigating the segmental and suprasegmental features of their pronunciation compared to the General American (GA) pronunciation model using a pre-determined dialogue. Although they are non-native speakers and have had limited exposure to formal pronunciation instruction, their performance highlights the possibilities of second language (L2) learners to obtain highly intelligible pronunciation. The pronunciation analysis is presented within the context of American English in Japan and the common pronunciation errors and difficulties Japanese learners of English may encounter during the language acquisition process. Furthermore, a consideration of teaching and learning implications in relation to the Japanese Katakana language system and the native speaker syndrome effect on pronunciation will be presented to support the acceptance of pronunciation intelligibility over native-like pronunciation.

1. Introduction

Pronunciation competence is a challenge for both Japanese teachers and learners of English due to the limited exposure to pronunciation training and the biases, both explicit and implicit, toward native-like pronunciation in the Japanese educational system. The classroom environment is extremely critical in increasing English proficiency as Japan is a predominant monolingual country with little opportunities to encounter English outside of the classroom experience (Uchida & Sugimoto, 2019, p. 31). However, pronunciation is often neglected in English classrooms as phonetics or pronunciation training is not always mandatory in teacher training leading to wide variability of pronunciation knowledge and teaching skills. Another factor is that Japanese teachers of English see the American or British English as the ideal pronunciation model and the amount of confidence they have in their own pronunciation based on these ideals affects the classroom environment for their students (Uchida & Sugimoto, 2019).

With these challenges in mind, this study will profile two learners that have agreed to participate in a pronunciation exercise focusing on their segmental and suprasegmental performance relative to the General American (GA) pronunciation model and the common difficulties Japanese learners of English have. Before the analysis, a consideration of the history of English and its relationship with Japan in shaping modern education models within the pronunciation acquisition context is necessary to better understand the successes and difficulties both learners encountered. Finally, the study will conclude with comments about teaching and learning implications to bring more awareness to pronunciation and promote intelligibility for Japanese learners of all levels.

2. History and Background of English in Japan

Japan has a unique relationship with English because it “does not have a history of colonial rule by a Western power” although it was briefly occupied by the US after World War II (Sergeant, 2011, p. 16). English was never officially introduced into the infrastructure of the country so the history of English in Japan could be condensed into the century and a half since the Meiji Restoration of 1868. There have been three transitional periods for the teaching of English in since the Meiji restoration: The first being the Meiji restoration era of the

late 1800's, the second being after World War II in 1945, and the third being the program of *kokusaika* or internationalization of the 1980s (Seargeant, 2011, p. 16-17). The first period was when Japan opened to the international community after the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry, an American naval officer, to Japan in 1853 which spurred the end of Japan's isolationist foreign policy and started a program of modernization which included the influx of foreign language teachers, specifically English language teachers. The second period was after World War II where the American occupation led to the introduction of English as an important school subject. The third period was the *kokusaika* (internationalization) program which introduced reforms to the education system emphasizing a shift from grammar-translation method to the communicative approach (Seargeant, 2011, p. 17-18).

Thus, according to Kachru (1990), Japan would be identified as an expanding circle country where English has no official or administrative status but is studied for specific purposes. As an expanding circle country, Japanese learners study English as a foreign language and tend to conform to the inner circle norms where British or American native speakers are seen as authoritative models which Japanese learners should follow. For example, a study of audio materials from Japanese junior high school textbooks reveals that there is a predominance of the North American accent with little accent variation. This implies that "the goal of pronunciation should be a native-like accent" and may not represent the true internationalization of English (Sugimoto & Uchida, 2018, p. 26).

Understanding Japan's role as an expanding circle country and the three transitional periods for English teaching and learning coincide with the expansion of English loanwords that have entered Japanese vernacular and the use of the Katakana writing system. Katakana is one of three writing systems in Japanese along with Hiragana and Kanji and is unique in that it helps novice language learners in Japan to quickly process English words and can accelerate comprehension and production when written in Katakana (Yamada et al., 2022, p. 4). Any foreign word transcribed into Japanese (called *gairaigo*) could use the Katakana writing system instead of the English alphabet. An example would be the word "shop". In Katakana, "shop" would be written as ショップ (/joppu/) allowing people to read, pronounce, and comprehend "shop" without English. There are instances where semantic changes alter the meaning and grammatical use English loanwords when written in Katakana but within the context of pronunciation, this system aims to increase intelligibility of Japanese learners, especially beginners, and teachers who do not have the necessary pronunciation training and may feel anxiety about their own pronunciation (Yamada et al., 2022, p. 12). Katakana effects on teaching and learning implications will be discussed at the end of the study but with an understanding of the cultural and linguistic history of English in Japan, the pronunciation performance of two learners will be investigated.

3. Methodology

Learner Profiles

Two Japanese learners of English, a junior high school student and a high school student, were chosen for this analysis as they were participants in the Japanese education system where English is a required subject. The learners attended a private junior high and high school, but the school did not have a specialized English program, specifically pronunciation training or classes, that may differentiate them from other private or public junior high and high schools in Japan. One key difference from other Japanese learners is that both learners have been exposed to American English in their private lives since an early age. They have never lived abroad but have vacationed in the US on a bi-annual basis due to their parents' desire for them to have an international education, experience, and career. They have also received extra English education from personal American tutors outside of the classroom environment. Therefore, their exposure to American English affected their pronunciation to better fit the American accent than the British English accent. The dialogue was recorded in one take and the learners had one to two minutes to look at their portion of the text prior to recording to replicate their natural and spontaneous English performance and pronunciation.

At the time of recording, Learner A was 14 years old, and in the 2nd grade of junior high school (U.S.

equivalent of 8th grade). She would be considered an intermediate learner of English but could be categorized as an upper intermediate learner for her age group in Japan because of her Eiken Grade 2 level score which is equivalent to CEFR B1+ and supposes that the learner is “expected to be able to understand and use English at a level sufficient to allow them to take part in social, professional, and educational situations.” (Eiken Foundation of Japan, n.d.). She started learning English at the age of five when she attended an English kindergarten school and has continued to study regularly since. In junior high school, she has been studying English for about ten to fifteen hours a week in and out of school.

Learner B is the older sister of Learner A and she was 17 years old at the time of recording. Learner B was in the 2nd grade of high school (U.S. equivalent of 11th grade) and she has upper-intermediate English level for her age group evidenced by her Eiken Pre-1 level score which is equivalent to CEFR B2 and supposes that the learner “can understand and use the English necessary to participate effectively in social, professional, and education situations” (Eiken Foundation of Japan, n.d.). Like Learner A, she was exposed to English at a young age attending an English Kindergarten school at age 5. Since entering high school, she has been studying English for about fifteen to twenty hours per week.

Received Pronunciation (RP) vs General American (GA): A Summary

For the transcription reference, General American (GA) pronunciation model was used because of the learners’ American English familiarity and background. It is important to highlight the differences between Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) before the analysis. RP has been traditionally selected by linguists to represent Standard British English and “is perceived as representative of English in that it is the accent taught to many foreigners and it is the pronunciation given in dictionaries” (Ballard, 2013, p. 223). GA is the American pronunciation system and differs from BP in some key areas but one example from consonants and vowels will be briefly mentioned. Consonant-wise, the main difference is that GA pronounces the final /-r/ while BP does not (Crystal, 2002, p. 307). A good example is the word *river*. In BP, the word would be pronounced as /ˈrɪvə/ while in GA, it would be pronounced as /ˈrɪvər/. Vowel-wise, RP has many words using /ɑ:/ which are pronounced with /æ/ in GA (Crystal, 2002, p. 307). A good example is the word *laugh*. In BP, it is pronounced as /lɑ:f/ while in GA, it is pronounced /læf/. These subtle differences between the two pronunciation systems also could be seen in suprasegmental features.

Jenkins (2000) identifies suprasegmental differences including stress, intonation, and rhythm, to distinguish the pronunciation for speaker intelligibility. Within the context of RP and GA, the integration of French loanwords highlights the stress differences in syllables. GA tends to have a final-syllable stress while RP stresses an earlier syllable and this may be a result of American English respecting “the fixed accent of the French language, which in most cases falls on the last syllable” (Gomez, 2009, p. 11). Two syllable words like *ballet*, *buffet*, and *garage* highlight the differences where RP stresses the first syllable (/ˈbæleɪ/, /ˈbʌfɪt/, /ˈgærɑ:ʒ/) while GA highlights the second syllable (/bæˈleɪ/, /bʌˈfɛt/, and /gəˈrɑʒ/). Gomez (2009) also highlights that words that end in -ate have different stress patterns. Most two-syllable verbs like *dictate*, *donate*, and *locate* have a first-syllable stress in GA (ˈdɪk,tet, ˈdɒʊ,nɛɪt, ˈlɒʊ,ketɪ) and a second-syllable stress in RP (/dɪkˈteɪt/, /dəʊˈneɪt/, /ləʊˈkeɪt/).

For intonation and rhythm, GA intonation tends to have fewer rapid pitch changes that are represented in RP and rises and falls are more spread out over the phrase or sentence resulting in GA sounding monotonous to the British RP sounding “exaggerated or affected” to Americans (Collins & Mees, 2003, p. 309). For rhythm, GA tends to lengthen stressed vowels and has a slower rate of delivery while RP has a more rapid rate of delivery with the elimination of weakly stressed words. Collins and Mees (2003, p. 310) point out that GA may sound rhythmically “drawled” to British listeners, while RP may sound “clipped” to American listeners. The complete transcription from the GA pronunciation model of the learners can be found in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. Appendix 1 is the transcription of the two learners, with A1-A4 being the produced transcript of Learner A and

B1-B4 being produced by Learner B. Appendix 2 is the standard GA transcription based on the standard American English accent. The pronunciation differences from the learners to the standard GA are highlighted in blue in Appendix B.

4. Analysis of the Learners

Segmental Features: Consonants

Japanese learners, in general, have two segmental issues, “(a) sounds present in English but not in Japanese and (b) differences in the distribution of phonemes and allophones” (Carruthers, 2006, p. 17). Consonants, phonetically, “involves some kind of narrow, partial or complete closure (or stricture) in the vocal tract – usually in the mouth” (Ballard, 2013, p. 227). Phonologically, “they are the units of the sound system which typically occupy the edges of a syllable” and “may also appear in sequences (clusters)” (Crystal, 2002, p. 242). For Japanese speakers, some of the most noticeable problems for consonants are /l/, /r/, /θ/, /ð/, and /v/. They pronounce both the /l/ and /r/ as /r/ (Thompson, 2001, p. 298). They also pronounce the /v/ as /b/. /θ/ and /ð/ do not occur in Japanese and could be pronounced as /z/ or /ʃ/ and /dʒ/ (Thompson, 2001, p. 298).

The two learners in this analysis did not have issues with “trouble consonants” that most Japanese have although Learner A slightly struggled with /s/ and /θ/ in “something” in line A2 of Appendix 1. She almost made the mistake of pronouncing the “thing” (/θ/) as /s/ as many learners would and her pronunciation of “some” seems to be a hybrid of /s/ and /θ/. Her transition from “some-“ /s/ to “-thing” /θ/ was ambiguous but she was able to pronounce it better than most Japanese learners showing her command of these problematic features compared to other learners.

Learner A did not pronounce the words that end in plosive /d/ and /t/ in non-connected words. Additionally, she did not fully pronounce the final plosives for “good” in lines A1 and A2 and “could” in line A3 of Appendix 1. Her difficulties might be because in Japanese, words do not end with a consonant and are predominantly open syllables (Ohata, 2004, p. 8). A lot of Japanese learners add a vowel sound or do not say the final consonant to fit the Japanese word syllable pattern (Andrade, 2005, p. 3). Learner A pronounced the word “good” as (gʊ) while in GA it should be pronounced as (gʊd). Many Japanese learners tend to pronounce it as /gʊdo/ caused by the katakana influence altering English words as loanwords.

Their ability to pronounce connected words according to the GA model was impressive. They omitted the plosives /d/, /t/, /k/ of connected words but it sounded natural as most native speakers would do the same when speaking. An example from the dialogue would be “Did you”, “Would you”, “Thank you”, and “It’s” being pronounced as /dɪdʒu:/, /wʊdʒu:/, /θɛŋkjʊ:/, and /ɪs/, respectively.

One part that Learner B had trouble with is the last sentence of the dialogue “Yes, then we can catch up on what’s been happening”. The word “happening” is pronounced as /hæpɪŋ/ missing the /ən/ in /hæpənɪŋ/. Compared to other Japanese learners, her advanced level and her ability to read at a higher pace might have caused her to read that word too fast thus glossing over the correct pronunciation. Another factor could be that Japanese speakers tend to not say /n/ after a vowel (with nasalization of the vowel) or it may become /m/ or /ŋ/ (Thompson, 2001, p. 298). Their overall consonant performance was commendable and their exposure to English starting at a young age helped them recognize and pronounce consonants that are not in the Japanese sound system. Their abilities support the idea that learning a second language in childhood with frequent exposure and practice can help learners “speak it fluently and without a ‘foreign accent’” even without formal pronunciation training using the IPA. (Ahmadi & Gilakjani, 2011, p. 74).

Segmental Features: Vowels

Vowels, in contrast to consonants, “involve no closure or contact of [any part of the mouth] and the airstream flows unobstructed out of the mouth” (Ballard, 2013, p. 227). In Japanese, there are five vowel phonemes (short and long forms) while there are twenty vowel phonemes in English (Kanavagh, 2007, p. 284).

The other difference between English and Japanese vowels is the tense/lax distinction (Ladefoged & Johnson, 2010). Tense vowels tend to be longer in duration than lax vowels. The differentiation between tense and lax vowels is made according to how much muscle tension or movement in the mouth is involved in producing vowels (Ladefoged & Johnson, 2010). Vowels produced with extra muscle tension are called tense and vowels produced without much tension are called lax vowels (Ohata, 2004, p. 4). The tense/lax vowel pairs of English like /i/ vs /ɪ/, /e/ vs /ɛ/, /u/ vs /ʊ/, do not exist in the five-vowel system of Japanese as there is no tense/lax difference (Ohata, 2004, p. 5). The learners performed commendably with vowels but the differences between English and Japanese vowels could be seen in their performance.

The first line for Learner B contains the word “Manchester” (/mæntʃɪstər/), but Learner B pronounces it as /mentʃɪstər/. This could be related to the tense/lax distinction thus “Japanese speakers may tend to shorten English long vowels which do not exist in their native language phonological system” (Bada, 2001, p. 4). So, they may pronounce /æ/ as /e/, /e:/ or /a:/; /ʌ/ with a rather open /a/; and /ɒ/ and /ɔ:/ with /o/ or /o:/ (Kavanagh, 2007, p. 286). Learner B did not struggle with other /æ/ pronunciations, so it is possible that her struggle with “Manchester” is due to the unfamiliarity of the word. Another area Learner B had trouble was with “been” /bi:n/ in the last line. She pronounces it as /bɪ:n/. Her pronunciation would have been correct with RP but if we compare it with GA, she elongated the vowel phoneme /ɪ/ to /ɪ:/. This is counter to most Japanese learners because they produce “the tense/lax vowel pairs of English almost identically as if they were the same vowels” so “sleep”, “taste” and “stewed” could be pronounced the same as “slip”, “test”, and “stood”, respectively (Ohata, 2004, p. 12). An argument could be made that she overcompensated for the extra “e” in “been” in her pronunciation for the recording.

Learner A performed well on her vowel pronunciations, but she expressed the word “Coffee?” (/kɒfi/) at the end of line A2 of Appendix 1 as /ko:fi/. It is a very minor distinction, but it could be her way of navigating the difficulties most Japanese speakers have in pronouncing /ɒ/ as /o/. She starts her pronunciation as /o/ but changes it to the correct /ɒ/ by the end of the vowel with the finished sound being close to /o:/. Learner A and B’s command of the consonants and vowels exemplifies their intelligible English level. Their suprasegmental features specifically word stress, sentence stress and rhythm, and intonation also highlight their high pronunciation intelligibility.

Suprasegmental Features: Word Stress

Stress is the “means by which we give one syllable greater prominence than another” (Ballard, 2013, p. 271). Prominence is produced by four main factors: loudness, length, pitch, and quality (Roach, 2009, p. 74). Word stress is similar in both English and Japanese, but they differ in terms of prominence. Ohata (2004, p. 10) mentions that in English, stressed syllables are marked by making vowels longer and louder (stress accent language), while in Japanese stressed syllables involve saying the vowels in a higher pitch (pitch accent language). Because of this, the Japanese language does not have “weak” unstressed forms of words like “was”, “can”, or “have” so learners may have trouble recognizing unstressed syllables in English. Learner A and B’s word stress tends to occur at beginning of her sentences. It was difficult to hear word stress in other parts of the sentences. In line A2 of Appendix 1, Learner A puts stresses on “Good”, “drink”, and “tea” but she avoids stressing other words in that line like “something” that would be stressed in GA. In line A4, she stresses “OK” but not “kettle” which would be stressed in GA. For learner B, in line B2, she only stresses “Tea” in the line and does not stress “lovely”. The learners do not stress words that should be stressed in GA so it makes it difficult to hear their word stresses in the middle of sentences. The sentence stress especially rhythm further highlights their inability to recognize stressed syllables.

Suprasegmental Features: Sentence Stress and Rhythm

In English, speech is “rhythmical” and the rhythm can be “detectable in the regular occurrence of stressed

syllables” (Roach, 2009, p. 107). English is defined to have a stress-timed rhythm where stressed syllables occur at regular intervals whether they are separated by unstressed syllables or not (Roach, 2009, p. 107). Japanese, on the other hand, has syllable-timed rhythm where all syllables occur at regular time intervals and the “time between stressed syllables will be shorter or longer in proportion to the number of unstressed syllables” (Roach, 2009, p. 107-108). The time to say a sentence in English is dependent on the number of stressed syllables but in Japanese the time to say a sentence is dependent on the number of total syllables. Learner A exemplifies this with line A4. The entire line is said in a syllable-timed rhythm rather than stress-timed rhythm thus making the sentence sound unusual. Learner B does slightly better with stress-timing her rhythm, but she still struggled with some parts of the dialogue. Line B3 highlights this. She has good command of stress-timing “It’s a real pleasure” but most of the second part “and it’s not out of my way at all” is syllable timed.

Suprasegmental Features: Intonation

In intonation, pitch of the voice is crucial. The pitch of the voice is described in terms of high and low (Roach, 2009, p. 119). Intonation has three main functions: it indicates the speaker’s purpose or attitude, it serves a grammatical function, and highlights information structure such as known versus new information (Ballard, 2013, p. 283). Japanese and English have some intonation similarities such as having “a rise on the utterance-final question particle” and a “fall for confirmation and agreements” (Thompson, 2001, p. 297). One key difference between Japanese and English intonation is pitch variation. Japanese uses less pitch variation which results in using pitch changes to mark stress on the word level, producing more monotonous intonation compared to English (Avery & Erhlich, 1992). Both learners performed clearly with rising intonations for question statements. With the other parts of the dialogue, they have less pitch variation which makes it difficult to hear some stresses and makes their voice sound monotonous. Both learners had some trouble with suprasegmental features, but it would not affect the listener’s ability to understand because they have a good command of pronunciation. Starting at a young age gave them an advantage but a discussion of teaching and learning implications for all learners might help understand language learner pronunciation difficulties and provide a model to approach pronunciation more effectively.

5. Discussion: Teaching and Learning Implications

The Katakana Effect on Pronunciation

The two learners in this study were fortunate to have learned English at a young age where their exposure to English pronunciation coincided with their basic English education thus being able to avoid some of the pronunciation pitfalls such as struggles with /l/ and /r/ or adding extra vowel sounds to the end of words that change syllable cadence. However, for most Japanese learners in the Japanese school system, Katakana has a profound effect on Japanese learners’ English speaking and pronunciation because most learners are introduced to English words through the Katakana writing system. The argument for Katakana is that since Japanese lacks some of the vowels and consonants in English, Katakana acts a “phonetic approximation” helping learners to “filter incoming language through native phonology [and] aids in perception of foreign phonemes and cognate relationships” (Daulton, 2008, p. 3). Additionally, due to the syllabic restrictions of Katakana, “consonant clusters cannot be produced without putting vowel sounds in between them” (Olah, 2007, p. 179). In Japanese, “taxi” would be written as タクシー (/takʊʃi:/). The original English word has two vowel sounds but in Katakana, the word expands to three vowel sounds, /a/ /ʊ/ /i:/. Beyond phonological changes, there are semantic changes Katakana employs with some English words such as semantic narrowing/widening, acronyms, and semantic substitutions.

Native English proponents have criticized Katakana for the distortion of the original pronunciation of English words, but Japanese teachers of English have advocated the use of Katakana for vocabulary building in novice learners because it is easier to learn, remember and process (Yamada et al, 2022, p. 4-5). The dilemma for

most teachers is whether to use Katakana to help with vocabulary development while sacrificing native pronunciation or not use Katakana which could lead to novice learners struggling to learn a new set of letters compared to their European counterparts who are familiar with the English alphabet and sounds from an early age (Uchida & Sugimoto, 2018, p. 71). Similar to European children, being exposed to native pronunciation and the English alphabet from an early age helped the two learners in this study, however, selective implementation and introduction of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) in English instruction alongside Katakana could prove beneficial for novice learners in Japanese schools.

Most pronunciation errors and misconceptions “are likely due to [the Japanese learners] often not having been taught the basics of English phonological and orthographical systems” (Nogita, 2010, p. 112). Novice Japanese learners are not exposed to the phonemic alphabet and proper pronunciations. A survey conducted by Suarez and Tanaka (2001) shows that 40% out of 88 students interviewed claimed that their pronunciation problems came from a “lack of pronunciation instruction in their six years of English curriculum” (as cited in Nogita, 2010, p. 83). Uchida and Sugimoto (2018, p. 71) supports using Katakana as a “reference point and a shortcut to achieve the end product pronunciation”. An example is with the word “dawn”. By showing the closest Katakana, in this case ドーン / do:n/ instead of ダウン / daun/ with the phonetic expression /dɔːn/ and the English pronunciation that accompanies it could be more readily understood by Japanese learners of English with pronunciation. Implementation of Katakana to assist the understanding of the IPA and pronunciation must be supported by the acceptance of intelligibility in classrooms and demystifying the Native speaker syndrome.

The Native Speaker Syndrome

Learners A and B performed at a highly intelligible level although some pronunciation divergence from the GA pronunciation model is noticeable. Their high intelligibility compared to other Japanese learners showcases the possibilities of English learners in Japan. However, their performance would classify them as an accented, non-native speaker due to disparities from the GA pronunciation model (see Appendix 2). After their performance, the two learners commented that it was hard to say the dialogue comfortably and felt they did not perform well in the task due to mistakes in reading clearly. This lack of comfort and self-criticism may be a result of the native speaker syndrome that is persistent in outer circle countries (Yano, 2011).

The native speaker syndrome is an idea that foreign learners want to understand, speak, read, and write like a native speaker. Many Japanese “think that only native speaker English is real, natural and authentic, and thus worthy of learning” (Yano, 2011, p. 133). Among a survey of 100 junior high school English teachers, 93% preferred American or British pronunciation models and 84% proclaiming that native-like pronunciation is desirable for English teachers (Uchida & Sugimoto, 2019, p. 28). Furthermore, teachers were more tolerant of student less-native pronunciation, but believed that learners, especially teachers, should strive for native-like pronunciation (Uchida & Sugimoto, 2019, p. 31).

In pronunciation training and the status of English as an international language, there are two issues in Japan. Firstly, this study mentions two types of pronunciation models, RP and GA so which model is the standard “native speaker pronunciation” may be difficult to identify because of the variables within RP and GA (as illustrated in an earlier section of this study, Received Pronunciation (RP) vs General American (GA): A Brief Summary). Secondly, due to the native speaker syndrome, achieving native-like pronunciation levels for Japanese learners of English is a near impossible goal so they may be setting themselves up for failure if their performance does not match their native speaker syndrome ideals.

Embracing intelligibility as a realistic goal could be an alternative. English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), with a focus on non-native speaker English while not excluding native speaker English, is an example of intelligibility that can benefit L2 learners as 25% of the world’s population speak English and 80% of communication in English is done between non-native speakers and ELF (Yano, 2011, p. 133). Intelligibility

within ELF would not be focused on interactions with the native speaker but rather help learners increase comprehensibility and interpretability in interactions with all speakers of English, not just native ones. This shift from a native context to a plural context "considers the diversity of the social and cultural context in which the learners will be using the language as fundamental to any informed and realistic choice of a classroom model" (Berns, 2009, p. 725). In the English learning classroom, Berns (2009) emphasizes the importance of model selection. Model, in terms of developing intelligibility from a plural context, "implies a linguistic ideal that a learner and teacher keep in mind in the course of language instruction" (Berns, 2009, p. 725). Berns (2009, p. 725-726) recommends that a good starting point for selection of a model is a consideration of:

- (1) the uses the learners will make of the language and
- (2) the users who are members of the group in which learners will become members.

Careful consideration of model from an ELF perspective and a plural context could help Japan improve their English curriculum development and provide a more appropriate curriculum that focuses on Japanese learners instead of the learners following the native-like model. It could be argued that RP or GA should be used as a model for "standard" English pronunciation but in application, communicative intelligibility and understanding through pronunciation should take precedence to alleviate the native speaker syndrome for many Japanese and foreign learners of English. Although learners A and B did not have native-like GA pronunciation, their high intelligibility would not limit their English-speaking skills in most communicative contexts.

In Japan, it may be necessary to expose and bring into conscious other varieties of English from the Outer and Expanding Circle countries instead of North American English that dominates English textbooks (Uchida and Sugimoto, 2019). This may benefit both the teacher and learner. The teacher benefits because pronunciation that is intelligible may empower them to introduce pronunciation training into the classroom environment. The learner benefits because they understand the international and worldwide use of English and they can come to realize that there is nothing wrong with speaking intelligible English with an accent.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of two Japanese learners showed their high intelligibility of English pronunciation compared to the General American (GA) pronunciation model, but they still had segmental and suprasegmental issues many language learners have. Their English education and exposure beyond the formal education system has allowed them to avoid some of the common problems Japanese learners of English face. To diminish this gap, a deeper focus on teaching the phonemic alphabet aspects with Katakana to Japanese learners of English may help alleviate some of these issues but tempering expectations from native-like pronunciation to intelligible pronunciation such as ELF might help teachers and learners who are self-conscious of their pronunciation level. Finding the reasonable balance between teachers' expectations and learners' ability through case-studies should be researched further as English becomes more internationalized and non-native speakers make up the majority of English speakers and learners.

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Appendix 1: Learner Dialogue Phonemic Transcription

Learner A: A1-A4

Learner B: B1-B4

- A1: Did you have a good journey yesterday?
'didʒu: hæv ə gʊ dʒɜrni jɛstərdeɪ
- B1: Not too bad, just one short delay waiting in Manchester.
nɒtʊ: bæd dʒʌs wʌn ʃɔrt dɪleɪ weɪdɪŋ ɪn men'tʃɪstər
- A2: Good. Would you like something to drink? Tea? Coffee?
'gʊ: wʊdʒu: laɪk sʌmθɪŋ tu: 'drɪŋk 'ti: kɔ:fi
- B2: Tea would be lovely. Thank you.
ti wʊ(l)bi lʌvli θɛŋkjʊ:
- A3: It's great that we could meet today.
'ɪts greɪt θæt wɪ kʊd mi:tədeɪ
- B3: It's a real pleasure and it's not out of my way at all.
'ɪs ə rɪl plɛʒər æn ɪs nɒt aʊtʌv maɪ (wə) weɪ ædɔl
- A4: OK, let me put the kettle on.
ɔkeɪ lɛ mi pʊ ðə kɛdəl ʌn
- B4: Yes, then we can catch up on what's been happening.
It's been a long time, hasn't it?
jɛs ðɛn wɪ kæn kætʃʊp ʌn wʌsbɪ:n hæpɪŋ
ɪsbɪ:nə lɔŋ taɪm hæzənɪt

Appendix 2: General American (GA) Phonemic Transcript

- A1: Did you have a good journey yesterday?
dɪd ju hæv ə gʊd 'dʒɜrni 'jɛstər,deɪ?
- B1: Not too bad, just one short delay waiting in Manchester.
nɒt tu bæd, dʒʌst wʌn ʃɔrt dɪ'leɪ 'weɪtɪŋ ɪn 'mæn,tʃɛstər.
- A2: Good. Would you like something to drink? Tea? Coffee?
gʊd. wʊd ju laɪk 'sʌmθɪŋ tu drɪŋk? ti? 'kafi?
- B2: Tea would be lovely. Thank you.
ti wʊd bi 'lʌvli. θæŋk ju.
- A3: It's great that we could meet today.
'ɪts greɪt ðæt wɪ kʊd mi:t tə'deɪ.
- B3: It's a real pleasure and it's not out of my way at all.
ɪts ə rɪl 'plɛʒər ænd ɪts nɒt aʊt ʌv maɪ weɪ æt ɔl.
- A4: OK, let me put the kettle on.
'oʊ'keɪ, lɛt mi pʊt ðə 'kɛtəl ʌn.
- B4: Yes, then we can catch up on what's been happening.
It's been a long time, hasn't it?
jɛs, ðɛn wɪ kæn kætʃ'ʌp ʌn wʌts bɪn 'hæpənɪŋ.
ɪts bɪn əlɔŋ taɪm, 'hæzənɪt ɪt?