

# Vowel Contrast : English and Japanese

## 日英語の母音比較

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### INTRODUCTION

Most Japanese people begin to learn English as a second language when they enter junior high school, that is, when they are twelve or thirteen years old. By that time, students have already acquired a thorough understanding of the Japanese language and they have learned the particular Japanese way of thinking.

Therefore, it is much more difficult for twelve-year-old Japanese students to learn English than for Japanese infants to learn their native tongue. That which is similar in the two languages may help the Japanese students to learn English, but which is basically different hinders the student from grasping the language as a whole. For example, Eugene A. Nida has said that there is a primary difficulty in mastering those sounds which are present in a foreign language but are not found in the native tongue. As he has said:

The sounds of a language are basic to everything else, and the sounds of every language are distinctive. Sometimes missionaries are confused by the similarity of the alphabet, and when they learn that Spanish has only five significant vowel sounds, they are delighted, for they know that English has many more such sounds. They imagine that they can just pick up the five closest English vowels and use them in Spanish. However, Spanish vowels are not at all like English. Superficially, of course, there is a resemblance, but it does not take us long to recognize that a Mexican who has just begun to learn English does not use En-

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glish vowels.<sup>1</sup>

Much the same thing is true of those Japanese who attempt to learn the English language.

In the case of Japanese students who are beginning to learn English, it can be seen that they have two major problems, as M. Umegaki says. Firstly, when those students hear a sound that they cannot pronounce, they take it to be a similar sound in their own language which they can pronounce. And secondly, that sound which is substituted often hinders the students' pronunciation of the correct English sound in the long run.<sup>2</sup>

Some people insist that the shape of the mouth accounts for the inability to acquire English pronunciations. But Eugene A. Nida has said that it is not true. He has written as follows:

There are no hereditary gifts which enable one to acquire certain sounds and not others. In fact, any person of any race or tribe raised in any other part of the world can speak the language of that area without the slightest trace of "accent."<sup>3</sup>

Then how can the Japanese people acquire the correct English sounds that they do not have in Japanese? The answer is that they must learn the fundamental characteristics of the sounds both in Japanese and English. They must distinguish the Japanese sounds and the English sounds, and must realize that the pronunciation system in English is very different from that of Japanese.

We can divide sounds into their traditional classes of vowels and consonants.<sup>4</sup> This report is concerned with vowels which show significant difference between Japanese and English. In the first part of this report, we will discuss how different are the vowels of the two languages, and in the latter half, the effective ways of teaching English vowels will be discussed.

When we compare sounds between two languages, it is more important to study on the level of phoneme which is called the phonemic level than on the level of pronunciation which is called the phonetic level. This is because "a phoneme is a sound which the native speaker of a language knows to be a meaningful part of that language, and which enables him to make distinction between words."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, in this discussion we shall compare and contrast English and Japanese vowels on the phonemic level, referring to the sound on the phonetic level when necessary.<sup>6</sup>

## WHAT IS THE VOWEL ?

Before discussing the contrast between English and Japanese vowel usage, the defini-

tion of the vowel should be mentioned. R. H. Robins has written about the vowel:

A vowel is defined as a voiced sound in forming which the air issues in a continuous stream through the pharynx and mouth, there being no obstruction and no narrowing such as would cause audible friction.<sup>7</sup>

In brief, a vowel is defined as a sound produced without obstruction in the oral cavity.

However, if there is no obstruction in the vocal production of vowels, it may be asked how we can have more than one vowel. The answer is that “we can change the shape of the mouth, thereby affecting the quality of the sound initiated at the vocal cords.”<sup>8</sup>

The first factor in changing the shape of the mouth cavity is the position of the tongue in the mouth. The tongue may be kept low in the mouth, or raised in varying degrees, in the front toward the hard palate or in the back toward the soft palate. These positions give what are called front-open vowels, back-close vowels, front-half-open vowels and so forth, because the lower position of the tongue causes the mouth to open and the higher position of the tongue makes the mouth close.

The second factor which influences the resonance of the mouth is the position of the lips. “The lips may be protruded and rounded, withdrawn and stretched or they may be ‘neutral’, neither rounded nor stretched.”<sup>9</sup>

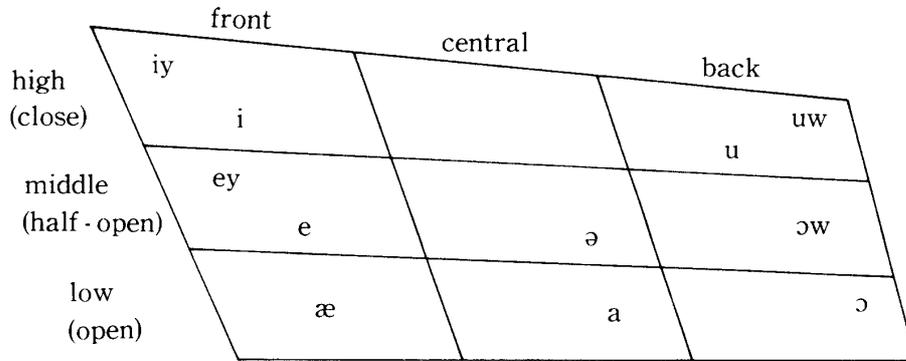
The third factor which affects the quality of the sound is nasalization, “that is with the palate lowered and with the air passing partly through the nasal cavity and nostril as well as through the mouth.”<sup>10</sup> Nasalized vowels are not distinctive in English nor in Japanese.

Beside the characteristics mentioned above, a vowel has another important trait, which is to be a syllable peak. The syllable is a sequence of speech sounds having a maximum inherent sonority between two minima of sonority, and the maximum sonority is called a syllable peak. B. L. Liles writes that “within each syllable there is one segment which is the most prominent acoustically, and this syllable ‘peak’ is usually a vowel.”<sup>11</sup>

## DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JAPANESE VOWELS AND ENGLISH VOWELS

There are three main factors in the production of each vowel as was mentioned before. Among them “the tongue position is the best means yet discovered for convenient description of the vowels.”<sup>12</sup> Chart 1 is intended to represent only approximately the relative positions of the tongue for the different vowels of the English language.<sup>13</sup> The left side of the chart represents the front of the mouth. As you see in chart 1, there are

**CHART 1**  
POINTS OF ARTICULATION OF ENGLISH VOWELS

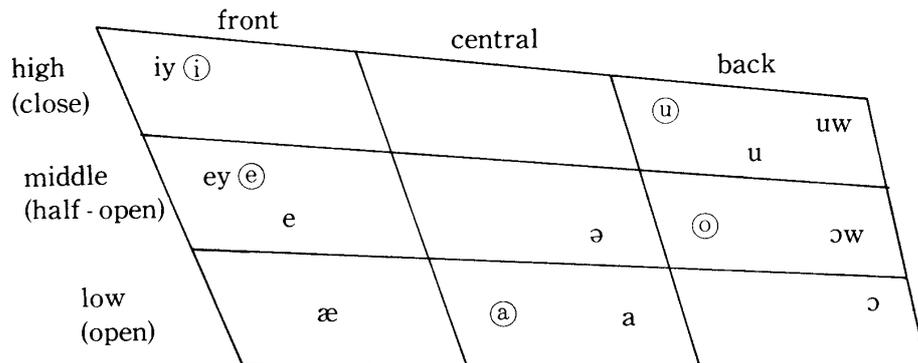


Source: Akira Ota, "Sounds Contrast  
between Japanese and English."

seven fundamental vowels in English, which are /i, u, e, ə, a, æ, ə/.<sup>14</sup>

In Japanese there are five vowels which are /i, e, a, o, u/. Though four of these phonemes are shown with the same symbols as the English phonemes, they do not have the same sound as in English. In chart 2, points of articulation of Japanese vowels are shown with circles around them. As chart 2 shows, there are differences in the number of vowels and in the points of articulations between English and Japanese.

**CHART 2**  
POINTS OF ARTICULATION OF  
ENGLISH AND JAPANESE VOWELS



Source: Akira Ota, "Sounds Contrast  
between Japanese and English."

The position of the lips is another factor in producing vowels. "The English front vowels are mostly by lip-spreading, and the back vowels by lip-rounding."<sup>15</sup> However no Japanese vowels are accompanied by lip-rounding.

Now that the general idea of the contrast between English and Japanese vowels has been established, we shall discuss each vowel one by one.

(1) 'a'-like Sounds

English has three 'a'-like sounds, which are /æ, a, ə/, while Japanese has only one, which is /a/. J/a/ is almost similar to E/a/, as in 'hot', 'pod', 'sock', though the point of articulation of J/a/ is closer to the front than E/a/.<sup>16</sup> (See chart 2.) However, there does not exist any vowel like E/æ, ə/ in the Japanese language. For example, in English, 'but' /bət/ and 'bat' /bæt/ are distinguished from each other, but this is not so in Japanese. In English, 'far' /far/ and 'fur' /fər/ are also distinguished, but not in Japanese. This means that these three phonemes of the English language, /æ/, /ə/ and /a/, are isolated, but to Japanese speakers they sound alike.

Therefore, it is very difficult for Japanese people to master the sounds /æ, ə/ both in listening and pronouncing. When they try to acquire the sounds /æ/ and /ə/, they must first recognize that /æ/ and /ə/ are particular sounds of English and that the Japanese language does not have either of them. Otherwise, "Japanese people will replace both 'pan' /pæn/ and 'pun' /pən/ with /pan/, and 'far' /far/ and 'fur' /fər/ with /faa/"<sup>17</sup>

(2) The Sounds of /i, u, e, ɔ/

The points of articulation of J/i, u, e, ɔ/ are closer to the vowels in E/iy, uw, ey, ɔw/ than E/i, u, e, ɔ/.<sup>18</sup> (See chart 2.) That is, the point of articulation of E/i/, as in 'big' and 'kick', is lower than that of J/i/, that of E/u/, as in 'full' and 'wood', is lower and further backward than that of J/u/, that of E/e/, as in 'set' and 'west', is lower than that of J/e/, and that of E/ɔ/, as in 'caught' and 'fought', is lower and further backward than J/o/.<sup>19</sup>

Not only are the positions of articulation different in English and Japanese, but also so are the positions of the lips in the sounds of back vowels. E/u/ and E/ɔ/ are accompanied by lip-rounding, but J/u/ and J/o/ are not. R. H. Robins says:

A number of Far Eastern languages have back vowels with spread lips, symbolized [u]<sup>20</sup> and [ɔ] corresponding to [u] and [o].<sup>21</sup>

The points of articulation of English central and back vowels, which are /a, ɔ, u/, are further backward than J/a, o, u/. This tendency can also be seen in the sounds which are uttered when one hesitates to say something. In Japanese it is /e/, on the other hand in English it is /ə/, the point of articulation of which is further backward than that of /e/.

### (3) Diphthongs

Each syllable has one segment which is most prominent acoustically. "This syllable 'peak' is usually a vowel, but it may consist of a combination of a vowel and a semivowel,<sup>22</sup> which is called a diphthong."<sup>23</sup>

In English there are many diphthongs, while the Japanese language has no diphthongs. This is because the syllable structure is different in English and Japanese.

R. H. Robins says that "Languages differ very much in the types of syllable structures they exhibit and the place they occupy in words. While CV<sup>24</sup> is a universal structure, beyond that each language has its own rules."<sup>25</sup> English has syllables of the CV type, but it also has CVC<sup>26</sup> syllables. This means that all obstruents and nasals can occur at the end of a syllable. The CVC type can be said to be the most typical English syllables. On the other hand, in Japanese, if the sound /n/ is considered to be an exception, all syllables are V or CV syllables; that is, all words necessarily end with vowels. No consonants come at the end of a syllable, except for a nasal /n/. Therefore, the Japanese language does not have VS<sup>27</sup> syllables either, since semivowels have characteristic like consonants as well as that like vowels.

In Japanese, the closest thing to the English diphthong is the combination of two vowels, which appear consecutively but in two syllables. Therefore, Japanese people who are learning diphthongs have a great deal of trouble in mastering them.

According to chart 2, English seems to have five front vowels, which are /iy, i, ey, e, æ/, as in 'beat bit, bait, bet, bat'. But as Sanford Schane says, "This is not really a system with five vowel heights, because the English vowels can be further classified as tense or lax."<sup>28</sup> For example, the vowel in 'beat' is tense in comparison to the one in 'bit', which is lax, and the vowel in 'bait' is tense while the one in 'bet' is lax. Tense vowels are pronounced with greater muscular tension. Therefore, it can be said that English has three main vowel heights with tense and lax vowels. The high and middle tense vowels are represented as diphthongs.<sup>29</sup>

As each of E/i/ and /iy/ has its own sound quality, so each E/u/ and /uw/, as in 'pull' and 'pool', has its own sound quality. The difference between E/i/ and E/iy/, or E/u/ and E/uw/ is not merely the difference of length, but the quality of the sound; one is lax and the other tense.

The Japanese language does not distinguish between tense vowels and lax vowels, nor does it have any diphthongs, as was mentioned earlier. Therefore, J/ii/ and J/uu/ are apt to be substituted for E/iy/ and E/uw/, because there are many words in the Japanese language which have the /ii/ or /uu/ sounds. The following contrasts Japanese words which contain /ii/ or /uu/ with English words which contain /iy/ or /uw/.

|          |                                   |
|----------|-----------------------------------|
| { 'key'  | /kiy/                             |
| { 'kii'  | /kii/ (meaning 'wonder')          |
| { 'knee' | /niy/                             |
| { 'nii'  | /nii/ (meaning 'the second rank') |
| { 'sue'  | /suw/                             |
| { 'suu'  | /suu/ (meaning 'to swallow')      |
| { 'you'  | /yuw/                             |
| { 'yuu'  | /yuu/ (meaning 'to tie')          |

As one can see, all of the English words shown above are one syllable words. On the other hand, all of the Japanese words have two syllables. In the Japanese language, since each vowel is pronounced distinctly and with equal length, J/ii/ or J/uu/ is twice as long as J/i/ or J/u/. J/ii/ and J/uu/ may be the closest sounds to E/iy/ and E/uw/ among the Japanese sounds, but it is evident that the quality of these sounds and the length of them are very different from each other; E/iy/ is tense and has one syllable, while J/ii/ is not as tense as E/iy/ and constitutes two syllables.

E/ey, əw/ are said to be close to J/ei, ou/, though the former consists of one syllable and the latter of two syllables. What is interesting in the Japanese language is that the same word can be pronounced with /ei/ on one occasion and /ee/ on another. The same thing can be said of the words whose vowels are pronounced /ou/ or /oo/. The following shows the contrast between E/ey/ and J/ei, ee/, and E/əw/ and J/ou, oo/.

|         |                                       |
|---------|---------------------------------------|
| { 'May' | /mey/                                 |
| { 'mei' | /mei/ or /mee/ (meaning 'niece')      |
| { 'ray' | /rey/                                 |
| { 'rei' | /rei/ or /ree/ (meaning 'politeness') |
| { 'bow' | /bəw/                                 |
| { 'bou' | /bou/ or /boo/ (meaning 'stick')      |
| { 'row' | /rəw/                                 |
| { 'rou' | /rou/ or /roo/ (meaning 'wax')        |

In the Japanese language, /ei/ and /ee/ are not distinguished as phonemes; that is, /ei/ and /ee/ are not able to show distinctions between words. The same thing can be said of /ou/ and /oo/ in Japanese. These show a great difference from English, which distinguishes /e/ from /ey/, and /ə/ from /əw/ as phonemes.

When the Japanese sounds /ee/ and /oo/, which are written on the phonemic level, are examined on the phonetic level, the following can be observed.

|         |          |          |               |                  |
|---------|----------|----------|---------------|------------------|
| 'Tokyo' | /tookyo/ | [tookyo] | <sup>30</sup> | (name of a city) |
| 'Reiko' | /reeko/  | [reeko]  | <sup>31</sup> | (name of a girl) |

Combinations of two vowels in Japanese, /ee/ and /oo/, are pronounced [ee] and [oo]

on the phonetic level. The movements of the mouth of [eɛ] and [oɔ] are the ones whose beginning is half-open, and which end with the mouth more open.

On the other hand, the movement of the mouth in the English diphthongs /ey/ and /ɔw/ show quite the reverse. They are half-open at the beginning, closed at the end.

#### (4) The Sound of /r/ which Appears after a Vowel

The Japanese language does not have syllables which end with /r/, because all Japanese syllables (except for /n/) are V or CV types, as was mentioned earlier. Therefore, in Japanese, the sounds which seem to be closest to E/ir, er, ar, ɛr, ɔr, ur/ are said to be J/ia, ea, aa, oa, ua/.<sup>32</sup> J/ia, ea, oa, ua/ are likely to be used as substitutes for E/ir, er, ɔr, ur/, as in 'ear', 'air', 'core' and 'poor'. However the mouth movement of J/ia, ea, oa, ua/ are the same types as those of [eɛ] or [oɔ] whose mouth movement is quite different from that of English: the first vowels are closed or half-open and the last ones are open. For Japanese people, this type of movement of the mouth is preferable. English-speaking people tend to prefer the other mouth movement, the end of which is more closed than the beginning.

#### (5) Two Tendencies Japanese People Have

Through this discussion of vowels in English and Japanese, we have realized that each vowel in each language has its own particular characteristics. And now we have understood that there does not exist any vowel in English which has exactly the same sound as a Japanese vowel. Therefore, it is clear that Japanese people should not replace any of the Japanese vowels for the English vowels.

After contrasting English and Japanese vowels in detail one by one, we can say that besides the number of the vowels, there are more fundamental, more important differences between English vowels and Japanese vowels. In other words, there are two main tendencies which Japanese people show when they utter vowels. First, Japanese people prefer the sounds whose points of articulation are close to the front. As was mentioned earlier, the points of articulation of Japanese five vowels are a little to the front when they are compared with English /i, e, a, ɔ, u/. Secondly, Japanese-speaking people prefer a special mouth movement, at the end of which the mouth is more open than at the beginning. This is quite the reverse mouth movement which all the English diphthongs show and which English-speaking people are very much accustomed to.

## PROBLEMS FOR JAPANESE PEOPLE

Now we need to discuss how the English vowel sounds can be learned by the Japanese people. Many people say that there is no royal road to learning pronunciation. The only way to learn correct pronunciation is to move one's own mouth and try to produce the sound again and again until the native English speakers say "That's it!"

However, there are some problems in Japan to take this way of learning. Although the country of Japan has become one of the most powerful countries in the world, the people in Japan are still dwellers of a small island who have never mingled with any other nation. Almost all the Japanese people have been speaking and hearing only the Japanese language since they were born, and they have had very few or no chance to be exposed to native spoken English in their everyday lives. Lots of TV programs which were produced in English-speaking countries are broadcast in Japan but they are all dubbed in Japanese and the original English sound cannot be listened to without using a special appliance. And what is even worse is that the study of English in Japan has been for a long time teacher-centered, lecture-oriented reading and writing lessons, little attention being paid to the sounds of the language. These are the factors which have caused Japanese people to form a habit of replacing the Japanese sound for the English sound. And that has given the students extremely a hard time to learn the correct English pronunciation in the class of English. And as a result of it, most Japanese students think that communicating orally with foreigners in English is a dream which seems to be too far to be realized, although they have a strong desire to make friends with people in other countries, and want to know about other countries.

Under this condition, it seems to be almost impossible to have students learn the exact sounds of English vowels, and students do not like to spend much of the precious class hours only trying to acquire the correct points of articulation of English vowels some of which seem to them all the same as Japanese vowels. Therefore, in order to teach English pronunciation in Japan, especially for adult learners, there has to be materials which are designed specially for Japanese-speaking learners and materials which motivate students to pay more attention to sounds.

## THREE EFFECTIVE WAYS OF TEACHING

Under this particular situation of Japan, teaching the exact point of articulation or the exact shape of lips to produce the real English sound cannot be the primary concern in teaching the sound of the English language, but the sound which is communicable has to

be the first thing to be concerned about. And carefully designed materials and class activities are to be required. The following are the three ways which worked best during my four years' experience with 18-year old Japanese students in an English language institute in Tokyo.

First, the substitute of the Japanese vowel for the English vowel is to be left uncorrected and treated as an OK sound as long as the sound can be recognized as the one the speaker means and unless it mis-conveys the meaning of the message, since most students, first of all, want to acquire a skill of communication rather than perfect pronunciation of every word. On the other hand, the sounds which are not communicable when replaced with the Japanese sounds have to be, by all means, practiced, corrected and learned.

Secondly, the words of English origin which have been introduced into the Japanese language and used by the common Japanese people in their everyday lives but whose pronunciation have completely been transferred to the Japanese sound are to be presented in class as examples of the worst English pronunciation and as a key to distinction of the English sound and the Japanese sound.

Thirdly, difficult pronunciation should be practiced mainly in conversational sentences which are based on the students' real-life situation.

We will discuss how and why these three ways of teaching work in class one by one.

#### (1) Substitution of Japanese Vowels

Why can we admit the use of Japanese vowel sounds for English vowels although every Japanese vowel is different from any of the English vowels? Let us take E/iy/ as an example. E/iy/ is different from its nearest Japanese sound /ii/ in many ways: in E/iy/ the tongue is curved much higher in front, and the lips are more spread than in J/ii/, and moreover, in E/iy/ the tongue glides further up and forward while voicing, which does not occur in the vowel combination of J/ii/. If the word 'beat' /biyt/ is pronounced as /biit/ by a Japanese student, it does not sound like natural English, and English-speaking people will take it as a foreign accent, but nobody will take it for 'bit' /bit/, 'bate' /beyt/ or 'bet' /bet/. The sound /biit/ can be recognized as no other than 'beat' though people may think that it sounds a little different. In the same way, the English vowels /i/, /e/, /a/, /ɔ/, /u/ and /uw/ can be replaced by J/i/, J/e/, J/a/, J/o/, J/u/, and J/uu/ respectively, since the use of these nearest Japanese vowels does not hinder any communication.

Thus the class hours can focus on practice of those vowels which cause trouble in communication when pronounced with the Japanese vowel, that is, /ey/, /æ/, /ə/, /ɛr/ and /ɔw/. These vowels are practiced most effectively in pairs of /ey/-/e/, /æ/-/ə/,

/əɹ/-/ar/ and /ɔw/-/o/,<sup>33</sup> which most frequently present difficulty for Japanese students.

In the class directed in this way, students are not disturbed by frequent interruption of his speech, nor are they discouraged by over-correction. It seems to be better to concentrate on the correction of a limited number of items until the students have enough confidence to speak English and to communicate in English in their real lives.

## (2) Use of Japanese Words of English Origin

There are many words in Japanese which are originally English words and introduced into the Japanese language. But many of these words are pronounced quite differently in Japan from their original English pronunciation. For example, the words with the vowel /əɹ/ like 'burner', 'curtain', 'turn', 'surfing', 'first' and 'skirt' have been pronounced with their nearest Japanese sound, which is the vowel combination of /aa/, and they are pronounced like /baanaa/, /kaaten/, /taan/, /saafin/, /faasto/ and /skaato/<sup>34</sup> respectively which would never be recognized as the original English words when heard by non-Japanese people. On the other hand, the words with the phoneme /ar/ like 'bargain', 'part', 'carpet', 'market', 'target' and 'barbecue' are also pronounced with /aa/ when introduced into the Japanese language, and these words are pronounced like /baagen/, /paato/, /kaapetto/, /maaketto/, /taagetto/ and /baabekyuu/ in Japanese. That is because the Japanese language does not distinguish the two contrasted English vowels of /əɹ/ and /ar/, and both of them are heard to be /aa/ by the Japanese people. Therefore, when they immitate the English vowels /əɹ/ and /ar/, they replace them with the closest Japanese sound /aa/, which sounds more like E/ar/ than E/əɹ/.

This fact, by all means, has to be realized by the Japanese students. And the practice of the vowel which must not be replaced by any Japanese vowel, like /əɹ/, must be done very carefully until the vowel sound produced by students become distinctive and communicable.

In the class, the teacher picks out the Japanese words of English origin and spells them in real English, arranging them on the blackboard in two separate columns according to the two different contrasted phonemes as follows:

|           |           |
|-----------|-----------|
| burner    | bargain   |
| turn      | target    |
| curtain   | carpet    |
| shirt     | sharp     |
| mermaid   | marmalade |
| permanent | partner   |
| hurdle    | heart     |



{ “Where can I get a **women’s** shirt ?”  
 “The purple carpeting over there is the ladies’ clothes department. You’ll find a lot of shirts there.”

- (b) If there are students who work at a restaurant or a coffee shop, sentences like below are interesting.

{ “Can I take your order now ?”  
 “Yes, please. I’ll take a hamburger, a bowl of soup, an apple pie and a coke.”  
 “Would you like something for dessert ?”  
 “Yes. I’d like a strawberry sherbet and a soda.”

- (c) Students who work at a store can practice with sentences as below.

{ “Do you work as a clerk at a supermarket ?”  
 “No. I’m working as a cashier at a bakery.”  
 “Do you work full-time at the laundry store ?”  
 “No, I’m a part-timer.”  
 “How much is this skirt ?”  
 “It’s thirty-five hundred yen. It’s really a good bargain.”

- (d) When there are students who are crazy about cars, or students who like to wear expensive clothes, sentences as below motivate them.

{ “What do you want for your birthday ?”  
 “I want a new car. Now I have a sedan, so I want a hardtop or a convertible for my birthday.”  
 “You are wearing a beautiful fur coat today. Is it a fox fur ?”  
 “No, it’s a rabbit fur.”

- (e) Students who belong to a tennis team are sure to be motivated and be encouraged by such sentences as below.

{ “Do you serve well ?”  
 “No, I’m not good at service, but my partner is a good server.”  
 “Did you win yesterday’s match ?”  
 “Yes, but it was a tough game. I’m glad that I am among the best four in this tournament now.”

These conversational sentences can be practiced between students, or the teacher may ask questions relevant to each student to make him answer with the English expressions which seem to be useful for him.

Practice of these sentences provides opportunities to use newly acquired English in the real life and encourage students to learn correct pronunciation, since students can immediately see the relevance and usefulness of the language they are learning. If the key words of these sentences include Japanese words of English origin, as the example

sentences show, the more familiar do students feel with the English language and the more strongly do they feel the necessity of correct pronunciation.

## CONCLUSION

In the first part of this discussion, we have compared and contrasted Japanese vowels to English vowels and have understood that no English vowel has the same sound as any Japanese vowel: some are slightly different, and others are far different. Therefore, it can be said that Japanese-speaking people should not replace any of the English vowels with Japanese vowels.

However, since there is difficulty and hindrance specific to the Japanese people in learning the sounds of English, materials and methods especially designed for the Japanese-speaking people are greatly required. In this discussion three methods have been suggested, which pay more attention to the skill of communication than to the skill of producing the sound itself.

Some points of the suggested methods may seem to be contrary to what has been discussed earlier in this paper, that is, no English vowel should be replaced by any Japanese vowel. However, by introducing the suggested ways of teaching English vowels, the class becomes teacher-directed and student-centered, and becomes full of activities which take the students out of the class work and into real life, encouraging independent, autonomous language development. And students will gradually realize that being able to pronounce each sound correctly is not the goal of pronunciation practice, but that when the sounds are pronounced correctly, communication becomes smooth and the speaker becomes happier.

These three ways of teaching pronunciation presented in this paper are planned for Japanese adult learners who have not had a chance to learn English pronunciation in their high school English lessons, and they will work well for most of those who have studied English but cannot communicate orally in English. It is regrettable that there are too many English-studying people in Japan who have not been given any opportunity to learn the sounds of the English language in a proper way, although the sounds of a language are basic to everything else. Some linguists say the incomplete learning of foreign pronunciation is a hopeless plateau where any further learning is impossible. But I believe in what Daniel Dato says, that is, "Successful learning of English as a foreign language can be achieved providing there is the proper motivation and discipline on the part of the learner, along with adequate skill and especially designed materials available for the teacher."<sup>35</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Eugene A. Nida, Learning a Foreign Language (New York: Friendship Press), p. 87.
- 2 Minoru Umegaki, An Introduction to Contrast between Japanese and English (Tokyo: Taishukan), p. 50.
- 3 Eugene A. Nida, Learning a Foreign Language (New York: Friendship Press), p. 88.
- 4 K. L. Pike distinguishes sounds into 'vocoids' and 'contoids', but the traditional distinction is more helpful for this study.
- 5 Suzette Haden Elgin, What Is Linguistics? (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 12.
- 6 The standard notation for sounds will be used in this report. A symbol between single quotation marks, like 'i', represents the orthographical symbol. A symbol between slashes, like /i/, represents a phoneme. A symbol in brackets, like [i], is a phonetic symbol.
- 7 R. H. Robins, General Linguistics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 94.
- 8 Bruce L. Liles, An Introduction to Linguistics (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 219.
- 9 G. Sibley Haycock, The Teaching of Speech (The Volta Bureau, Washington, D. C.:The Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf Inc., 1975), p. 81.
- 10 R. H. Robins, General Linguistics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 98.
- 11 Bruce L. Liles, An Introduction to Linguistics (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 225.  
Less often syllable peak is one of the other sonorants, such as [m], [n], [l].
- 12 John Samuel Kenyon, American Pronunciation (Ann Arbor, Michigan: George Wahr Publishing Company, 1958), p. 60.
- 13 There are several ways of classification of phonemes and different scholars show different phonemic symbols. In this discussion, the symbols classified by Akira Ota in Sound Contrast between Japanese and English (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1965) are shown, which are very clear and very convenient when they are compared with Japanese phonemes.
- 14 The others are the combinations with semivowels.
- 15 R. H. Robins General Linguistics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 97.
- 16 E/ / represents English phonemes, and J/ / represents Japanese phonemes.
- 17 Akira Ota, Sound Contrast between Japanese and English (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1965), p. 36.
- 18 Akira Ota, Sound Contrast between Japanese and English (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1965), p. 36.
- 19 In some dialect of English, these words such as 'caught' and 'fought' are all pronounced with [a]; speakers of these dialects may not have [ɔ]. Bruce L. Liles, An Introduction to Linguistics (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 220.
- 20 Pronouncing bilabial consonant /m/, open the lips a little, and you will be pronouncing the sound J/u/. Therefore, [u] (inverted 'm') is used as the phonetic symbol of J/u/.

- 21 R. H. Robins, General Linguistics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 97.
- 22 Semivowels are partially like vowels and partially like consonants. From the standpoint of production, there is no major obstruction. But at the same time they can not be "peak" of syllables by itself.
- 23 Bruce L. Liles, An Introduction to Linguistics (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 225.
- 24 'CV' means a single consonant followed by a single vowel.
- 25 R. H. Robins, General Linguistics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 139.
- 26 'CVC' means a syllable structure of consonant-vowel-consonant.
- 27 'VS' represents a single vowel followed by a single semivowel.
- 28 Sanford A. Schane, Generative Phonology (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1973), p. 13.
- 29 Some transcription systems write [I] instead of [i], [i] instead of [iy], [ɛ] instead of [e], [e] instead of [ey].
- 30 Kazuo Nakano, English Phonetics (Tokyo: Gakushobo, 1972), p. 20, p. 40.
- 31 [ɛ] is a vowel whose point of articulation is between [e] and [æ].
- 32 See p.4 concerning /aa/.
- 33 According to Charles C. Fries, English vowel should be taught to Japanese students in such contrast as are /i/-/iy/, /i/-/e/, /æ/-/ə/, /ə/-/ɔ/, /ar/-/ər/, and /ɔw/-/ɔ/. But /i/-/iy/, /i/-/e/, and /ə/-/ɔ/ do not seem to be necessary, but the contrast of /ey/-/e/ seems to be important for Japanese-speaking people since J/ei/, which is the closest phoneme to E/ey/, is not distinguished from J/ee/, and is very often pronounced [eɛ] on the phonetic level in Japanese.
- 34 Since all the Japanese syllables are CV type, except /n/, when the English word is loaned to the Japanese language, the English CVC syllables are usually added with another vowel at the end and pronounced in two syllables CVCV, such as /skaato/ of 'skirt'.
- 35 Daniel P. Dato, "Psycholinguistic Aspects of Foreign Pronunciation," Association of Sophian Teachers of English, Tokyo, 20 July 1985.

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