

University of Education Karlsruhe

English Department

Prof. Dr. Isabel Martin

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Pronunciation issues in English of speakers with different L1s

**Francesca Diligu**

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## 1. Introduction

Some learners' opinion is that one can "catch (like a cold) good pronunciation from input alone" (Levis 2015, A-52). If this were the case, after a certain period of time and practice, everyone would be able to speak with a pronunciation like that of the native speakers. However, some students seem to have a better pronunciation than others; some make faster progress and some learners, even after years of living in the country of the language they want to learn, do not make improvements and speak with a strong foreign accent.

Nowadays English is used not only by its native speakers, but also by those who come from another L1 (first language) background and from another culture. Each speaker seems to have a certain pronunciation depending on her or his origin. Moreover, not everyone aspires to acquire a pronunciation like that of the native speakers. As a teacher some questions inevitably arise: which rules must be followed? Is there a better pronunciation model than another? On which basis should pronunciation be taught?

The purpose of this paper is to establish whether pronunciation can be learned and if the answer is positive, which models are to be followed. In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to first define what pronunciation is and which factors it may influence it.

## 2. What is pronunciation?

According to Honey (1991, 5) pronunciation "has two main ingredients" which are accent and intonation. Even when speaking a standard variety of English, the speaker has an accent that reveals where he or she comes from. The standard language is mostly used in administrative, commercial and educational environments and also in newspapers, books and mass media. While the standard language is supposed to have no specific region, the accent is peculiar and exemplary of a specific part of a country (cf. Yule 2017, 269). On the other hand, intonation is "the 'tune' of a sentence", which makes a statement distinguishable from a question (cf. Honey 1991, 5). For this reason, it can be said that the pronunciation varies depending on where the speaker is from. In fact, "it is a myth that some speakers have accent while others do not" (Yule 2017, 269). Every standard language has different varieties.

Teachers of English normally teach to ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners a standard variety of English, which usually is the Standard American or the Standard British one. However, it has to be kept in mind that there are many other varieties of English such as Standard Indian English, Standard Australian English or Standard Canadian English (cf. Yule 2017, 269) and all of them are respectable varieties.

However, many students, even if they want to speak English with a certain pronunciation, be it for example British or American, encounter problems. This happens because pronunciation is not only a matter of accent and intonation. Why do some learners seem to have a better pronunciation than others?

## 2.1 Factors which influence the pronunciation

When trying to learn a language as a second or foreign language, the pronunciation of the learner may be more or less similar to that of the native speakers. That depends not only on the speaker's origin and therefore on his or her accent, but also on other factors.

It is evident that children can learn a language faster and more easily than adults. In fact, after a certain period, around the puberty, learning a language fully is more difficult (cf. Yule 2017, 210). This happens because the learners have developed "an unconscious commitment to the sounds and structures of an already known language" (ibid.), so that non-native speakers may have psychomotoric difficulties in pronouncing some sounds because they are not used to (cf. Rettinger 2013). For example, a Japanese student may find difficult to reproduce the sounds /l/ and /r/ because he has probably never heard or reproduced these sounds before.

Linked to age factors are affective factors. Children, when trying to learn new words, can overcome their inhibitions and embarrassment. Adults, on the contrary, are more likely to develop negative feelings and experience during the second or foreign language learning's process. Those negative emotions, such as a lack of empathy with the other culture or a sense of non-belonging, might create an acquisition barrier (cf. Yule 2017, 211). In fact, language is closely related to culture. A good example for that is presented by idioms, which if translated into another language, completely lose their original meaning. In the same way, people, being part of a social context and a specific culture, will be more or less willing to recognize themselves as belonging to another one. If a student does not feel he belongs to the culture of the language he is learning, he will always feel like a foreigner and the pronunciation will be affected in the same way.

As pointed out by Yule (ibid.) "this type of emotional reaction, or 'affect' may also be the result of dull textbooks, unpleasant classroom surroundings or an exhausting schedule of study and/or work", so that the teaching method also plays an important role in terms of acquisition of a language. Therefore, many studies have been carried out to find the best way to learn a foreign language effectively. Several methods and theories, such as the grammar-translation method, the direct method or the audiolingual method (cf. Harmer 2015, 56), have been researched in

order to improve both the quality of teaching and learning process. Each method focuses on a certain aspect: the grammar-translation method is based on the translation of sentences from the mother tongue into the foreign language and vice versa; according to the direct method on the contrary it is important to use only the target language in the classroom; finally the audiolingual method involves first a listening part and then a practise part in which the students have to repeat what they have heard. Each method has its pros and cons; however, the most important thing is that the teaching method must as much as possible reflect the needs of the students in order to motivate them to learn.

The motivation to learn a language can influence the language skills and the pronunciation as well. According to Yule (Yule 2017, 214), there are two kinds of motivation, instrumental and integrative. While students motivated by instrumental purposes want to improve in order to reach a goal, those with an integrative motivation, wishing to become a member of the aimed community, learn the second or foreign language for social reasons (cf. Yule 2017, 214).

Experiments have shown that learners with an integrative motivation are more successful and that they are especially “better at acquiring a good accent” (Christophersen 1973, 21).

Another important aspect that has to be mentioned is the amplitude of usage of the new language. As a child, people learn their first language within a social context and in the same way “acquisition in new cultures occurs best when learners are socially connected” (Levis 2015, A44). It is evident that the more often we use the language, the better our language skills and pronunciation will be. If a language is used only in a certain context, also the words that are used will be belonging and suitable only for that context. In order to have a rich vocabulary it is necessary to use the foreign language in more contexts. For the pronunciation it can therefore be said the same; this will improve if the language is used often.

Finally, another important aspect in terms of pronunciation, is presented by the similarities between the L1 (first language) and the L2 (second language). Through the “transfer”, which means “using sounds, expressions or structures from the L1 when performing in the L2” (Yule 2017, 213), also called “crosslinguistic influence”, the learner can take advantage from the similarities between the two languages. On the contrary, if the L1 strongly differs from the L2, the student might more likely make mistakes and compromise the intelligibility of the speech. These mistakes can be made on three level: at a level of sound, if for example a sound of the L2 does not exist in the L1; then at a level of grammar, if the grammar systems of the two languages are deeply different or, finally, at a level of usage of words when for instance a similar sounding word has another meaning in the L2 (cf. Harmer 2015, 156).

## 2.2 Common pronunciation difficulties for non-native speakers of English

As stated in the previous chapter, the pronunciation of the sounds of a language depends, among other aspects, on the age of the learner. Children are able to reproduce a wide range of sounds. However, it seems that this ability is lost by becoming adults (cf. Harmer 2015, 280). In fact, it may be “physically difficult to make foreign language sounds using particular parts of mouth, tongue or nasal cavity” (ibid.). Depending on the sounds existing in the speakers’ L1, it will be more or less difficult to pronounce a word correctly. For example:

- many languages have a smaller number of vowel sounds than English. Even in those languages in which there are a larger number of vowel sounds, there may not be the same ones as in English (cf. Marks and Bowen 2012, 17). For example, the “Cat vowel” /æ/, as in “trap”, “hat” or “cat”, does not exist, among others, in languages as Chinese, Japanese, Italian, German and Russian (cf. Rettinger 2013), so that it difficult for them to articulate it.
- The dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, as in “think” and “though” respectively, are not present in many languages and therefore represent a difficulty to most non-native speakers of English (cf. Marks and Bowen 2012, 17).
- For many Asian learners it is hard to reproduce the liquid /l/ and /r/, which are rather considered as an in-between sound of English /l/ and /r/ (cf. Ohata 1994, 7), so that “rice” may be pronounced “lice”.
- Each language uses syllables to form words differently. A sequence of following consonants is called a consonant cluster. The Slavonic languages, for instance, allow complex consonant clusters. Others, such as Japanese, only allow open syllables, so that every consonant must be followed by a vowel (cf. Marks & Bowen 2012, 20). Moreover, it also can happen that certain English consonant clusters exist in the student’s L1, but they do not occur in the same position within a word. Consonant clusters are often avoided by the learners by inserting a vowel between the consonants, or by deleting one of them (ibid., 21).
- Most Slavic languages, such as Russian and Polish, but also German and Dutch, do not allow final obstruent devoicing. So that words as “eyes” sound like “ice”, “leave” as “leaf”, “serve” as “surf” and so on (cf. Rettinger 2013).
- Languages such as Czech or German do not permit initial obstruent devoicing, so that German speakers often pronounce the English affricate /dʒ/ as either /tʃ/ or /ʃ/ (e.g. “gin” and “chin” are pronounced the same way) (ibid.)

Another problem seems to be represented by the intonation. For many students it is complicated to identify the difference between rising and falling intonation of a sentence (cf. Harmer 2015, 280). According to that, a statement can for example be interpreted as a question or it can be assumed that the speaker has not finished speaking yet (cf. Ohata 1994, 16).

The “linking” might also be problematic for many non-native speakers. In fact, in English the words are pronounced without pause or hesitation between them. The final consonants are “linked” with the beginning of the following word. On the contrary, other languages (e.g. German) use a glottal stop [ʔ], made by closing the vocal cords, before words which begin with vowel sounds, so that the speech may sound harsh and inharmonious (cf. Rettinger 2013).

Finally, most non-native speakers of English cannot distinguish between weak and strong forms. Weak forms are for example function words (articles, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions and auxiliaries) which are unstressed and reduced in connected speech. Because of that, weak forms are generally more frequent than the strong forms (cf. Marks and Bowen 2012, 23). Using the weak form instead of the strong form and vice versa can cause incomprehension. For example:

“I wanted to tell you **that** Laura is a good friend”

Weak form: /ðət/ =conjunction

Strong form: /ðæt/ =demonstrative pronoun

Those listed above are only examples of problems that non-natives may encounter. Depending on the mother tongue that is spoken, the difficulties will be different. For example, Russian speakers make different mistakes than Chinese students. Therefore, it is important as a teacher to understand the difficulties that students have in order to be able to concentrate oneself on certain aspects. Being aware about the own difficulties is a first step towards improvement. However, awareness does not guarantee improvement, the practice is also important.

### 2.3 Setting priorities

Pronunciation is not only a matter of accent. It of course reveals where the speaker comes from, but it is also influenced by many other factors such as the age of the student, the motivation he or she has to learn the new language, how similar the L1 and the L2 are, how often the second or foreign language is used and so on and so forth.

According to Walker (2010, 2014a), the students have different goals: some want to sound exactly like native speakers (Goal 1), others aim to feel comfortable while speaking English with native speakers, but do not necessary want to sound like them (Goal 2); then, there are

learners who only want to reach an international intelligibility, or in other words, only use English in ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) contexts (cf. Harmer 2015, 278). A lingua franca, or “common language”, is any language used to communicate between people who do not share the first language. For example, if two girls, one from Italy and the other from Bulgaria, speak in German to communicate to each other, German will be their lingua franca.

Depending on the reason why the students want to learn a language, there are teaching priorities to be set in order to improve their pronunciation. In fact, if a teacher set the focus on teaching English as a lingua franca while the students wish to speak as a native speaker, they might lose the motivation to learn or think that the teacher does not take into consideration the needs and wishes of the students. Furthermore, this type of learners may feel uncomfortable if they sound too “foreign”. In this case, it is necessary that the teachers “prioritise almost all native-speaker pronunciation features” (Harmer 2015, 278). However, it is important to keep in mind that, even if the pronunciation can be improved, through speaking activities for example, exactly a native speaker level cannot be achieved. This because, as Vivian Cook highlights, non-native speakers, by definition, can “never become native speakers without being reborn” (Cook 1999, 187).

Goal 2 and Goal 3 seem to be more reachable and real than the first one. Besides, one of the main purposes of language is to communicate (cf. Yule 2017, 21) and in order to fulfil this, language must be intelligible. To be understood, it is not strictly necessary to have a pronunciation like that of the natives.

Depending on what the students want, some pronunciation features are considered as “less important” than others (cf. Harmer 2015, 278). Based on Walker (2014a), with the intention of achieving a comfortable intelligibility while speaking with native speakers, teachers should set the focus as follows:

- All the consonants are equally important. More attention is paid for the aspiration of word-initial /p/, /t/ an /k/ (cf. Harmer 2015, 279).
- The vowel length is considered as a characteristic of each vowel sound. Furthermore, the quality of all the pure vowels and diphthongs should reflect as much as possible those of the chosen native speakers’ variety of English (ibid.).
- Consonant clusters are important in every position, especially if a mispronunciation affects the rhythm (ibid.).



- Features such as sentence and word stress, stress-timing, weak forms, schwa and tones are also considered to be a priority in order to feel comfortable when the listeners are native speakers (ibid.).

Simplifying those aspects of the language that have no effect on the intelligibility “would make life easier for both teachers and students” (Dauer 2005, 546). In the next chapter it will be analysed which pronunciation features play a more considerable role when speaking English as a lingua franca.

### 3. English as a Lingua Franca

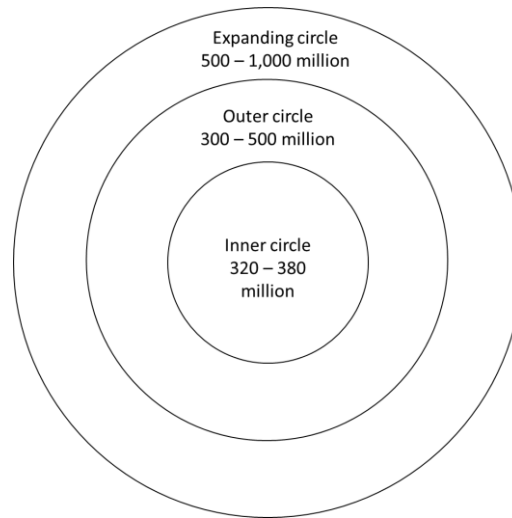
In the first chapter it has been stated that there are many varieties of English. According to Honey (1991), the English language can be divided into five main categories which have been established worldwide. There is the British English, which includes a large number of dialects (e.g. the “standard English”), then the American English, which describes the varieties of North, Southern and Black America. The Englishes of the Old Dominions are those varieties spoken in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, and finally the New Commonwealth English includes Indian subcontinent countries (e.g. India and Sri Lanka), Asian countries of the South-East (Singapore for example), and some varieties of English from East and West Africa (cf. Honey 1991, 6-8).

However, nowadays, not only native speakers make use of English. Indeed, it is studied around the world by both children and adults with the consequence that, through the decades, it has become a global language (cf. Crystal 2003) and “if there is one predictable consequence of a language becoming a global language, it is that nobody owns it anymore” (ibid., 2).

In 1985, the Indian linguist Braj Kachru identified three categories or “circles” which describe the development of the English language:

1. The *inner circle* includes those country where English is the first language (UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) and it counts around 320 – 380 million of speakers (cf. Crystal 2003, 60, 61).
2. In the *outer circle* are located those states in which English is spoken as a second language (e.g. India and Singapore) (ibid., 60). Here are counted 300 – 500 million of speakers.
3. The *expanding circle* represents those areas where English, considered internationally important, is taught as a foreign language. Examples of countries of this kind are China,

Japan, Russia. The number of the speakers included in this circle is about 500 – 1,000 million. However, this number is steadily growing (ibid.).



*Figure 1: Kachru's three circles of English (cf. Crystal 2003, 61)*

As shown in *Fig. 1*, the number of people who speak English as a foreign language has strongly exceeded that of native speakers. In fact, “nowadays English most frequently serves as a worldwide lingua franca for its vast numbers of non-native users” (Jenkins 1998, 119). The non-native speakers either use English to communicate with native speakers or with other non-native speakers. In the second case, English is used as a lingua franca. ELF can be therefore defined as “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (Seidlhofer 2011, 7).

For these reasons, it seems that the native speaker model does not correspond to the needs of those who utilize the language in an international context. ELF speakers “find themselves together to accomplish a particular task” (Jenkins 2000, 170) and do not necessarily aspire to sound like a native.

### 3.1 Lingua Franca Core (LFC)

If the purpose of learning English is to make oneself understood in an international context, some aspects of pronunciation are more important to preserve the intelligibility than others, so that “all teachers, native and non-native, will need to be well educated in the three core

phonological areas” (cf. Jenkins 1998, 125). According to Jenkins (1998), these three main aspects, on which teachers should focus on, are the following:

- Segmentals: most consonants are important to ensure good comprehensibility. The fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are considered as “non-core sounds” because they do not seem to lead to misunderstandings if mispronounced. To the distinction between long and short vowel sounds is given importance as well (ibid., 112).
- Placement of nuclear stress (especially when used contrastively): depending on which word the accent is placed, the meaning of the sentence changes. In the sentence ‘the cat is on the table’, if the nuclear stress was put on the word ‘table’, other possibilities, such as ‘on the chair’ would be excluded. If the stress was shifted to ‘the cat’, the learner would straight away understand that it is not for example the dog on the table but the cat.
- Articulatory setting: in combination with consonant and vowel sounds, the learner must acquire the basis articulation. This means that the student must be aware about the position of the lips, of the tongue and of the jaw while articulating a sound.

Pronunciation aspects that do not create problems in terms of comprehensibility are the word stress, the features of connected speech (elision, assimilation, linking and weak forms) and the rhythm. A variation of these might lead to misunderstandings if the listeners are native speakers but in an ELF context this is unlikely to happen (cf. Jenkins 1998, 123).

More specifically, the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) pays more attention on the following aspects (cf. Dauer 2005, 544, 545):

- All consonants are necessary. The consonant sounds /θ/ and /ð/ can be replaced by /f/ and /d/ respectively.
- Core sounds can be approximated as long as they do not affect the intelligibility.
- Initial voiceless stops /p/, /t/, /k/ must be aspirated.
- Initial consonant clusters must be pronounced without any simplification (e.g. sprint, spring).
- Medial and final consonant clusters can only be simplified according to L1 English rules.
- Final /r/ must not be dropped as in the British English (BrE). It must be rather pronounced as in American English (AmE).
- Medial /t/ is not voiced and must be pronounced as in British English.

- The quality of long and short vowel sounds must be preserved (as the /ɪ/ in “live” and the /i:/ in “leave”).
- /ɜ:/ as in bird cannot be substituted.

The LFC, simplifying some pronunciation features, seems to be a respectable, teachable and learnable model that can be chosen instead of other varieties of English. In fact, the norms of ELF are “primarily regulated by interactional exigencies, rather than by what native speakers would say, or would find correct, or ‘normal’, or appropriate” (Seidlhofer 2011, 18).

### 3.2 Reasons to teach the LFC

The LFC has been often criticized. For example: replacing the fricative /ð/ with a /v/ might be complicated for many English students (cf. Dauer 2005, 546); for Spanish L1 speakers, it is difficult to make a distinction between the sounds /v/ and /b/ (cf. Marks and Bowen 2012, 19). The sound /ɜ:/, according to Dauer (2005, 547) could also be simplified and substituted without problems. Furthermore, the Lingua Franca Core might “horrify” the native speakers because it differs from the standard varieties of English.

However, the intention of the LFC is not to replace the other varieties of English. It is proposed as a starting point, as another option for those who do not want to “imitate” a specific native accent. In fact, non-natives belong to another culture, they have another mother tongue. Trying to acquire a native accent is like wanting to hide one's origin, as if having an accent was a cause for shame or embarrassment. Some non-native speakers want the listener to notice where they come from, in fact “pronunciation is a domain within which one's identity is expressed” (Zuengler 1988, 34).

The LFC seems to take into consideration the needs and goals of the learners. Nowadays, English is not anymore only used by its native speakers, but also by people on the internet, on social media and it is the language of technology, business and international affairs. Non-natives use and change the language according to their needs. Why should people, who only want to close a deal, aspire to sound like a native speaker? In order to close a deal, they only need to be comprehensible and “if intelligibility is the goal, then it suggests that some pronunciation features are more important than others” (Harmer 2015, 278).

The LFC wants to preserve the intelligibility and at the same time simplify the English pronunciation features that, according to Jenkins (1998), mostly create problems to students with different L1s. Furthermore, it takes into consideration the identity of the learners and their origin. The Lingua Franca Core does not want to try to cover all the L1 possible combinations

and all the cases. Instead, the LFC’s intention is to keep the intelligibility and leave some areas open to variations, depending on the needs of the learners (cf. Jenkins 1998).

Finally, the LFC is not to be understood as a norm, that has to be followed, but rather as a model from which one can but must not necessarily draw inspiration.

4. Differences between English and Japanese Phonology

The more the L1 differs from the L2, the more difficult it will be to learn it. In this paper, the differences between English and Japanese are taken into consideration and it is pointed out which difficulties Japanese students may have in pronouncing English sounds.

Starting from the eighteenth century, some scholars carried out studies to find out if languages had aspects in common. It was discovered that the various languages belong to a certain “family” (cf. Crystal 2010, 302). The languages belonging to the same family present similarities for example in the grammar, in the syntax, writing and phonology.

While English, among other languages such as German and Dutch, descends from the Germanic family of the Indo-European lineage, Japanese is often considered as an Altaic language (cf. Crystal 2010, 311, 316). Therefore, it is clear that there are several differences between these two languages. Comparing the consonant sounds of both English and Japanese, the first differences are evident.

Place of articulation	Bilabial		Labiodental		Dental		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal	
Manner of articulation	-V	+V	-V	+V	-V	+V	-V	+V	-V	+V	-V	+V	-V	+V
Stops	p	b					t	d			k	g		
Fricatives			f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ				h
Affricatives									tʃ	dʒ				
Nasals		m						n				ŋ		
Liquids								l r						
Glides		w								j				

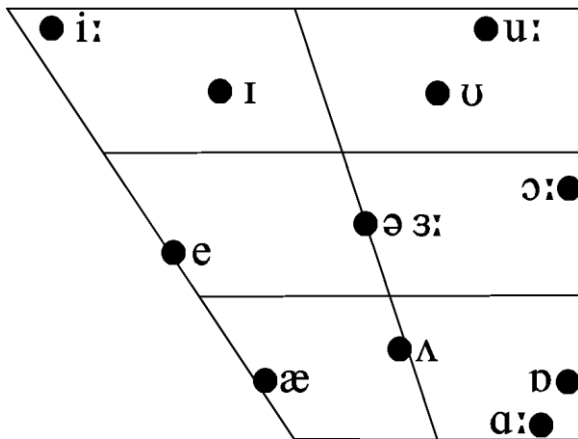
Table 1: English table of consonants according to place and manner of articulation (cf. Yule 2017, 33)

Place of articulation	Bilabial		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal	
Manner of articulation	-V	+V	-V	+V	-V	+V	-V	+V	-V	+V
Stops	p	b	t	d			k	g		
Fricatives	Φ		s	z	ç				h	
Nasals		m		n						
Liquids (Approximants)				r						

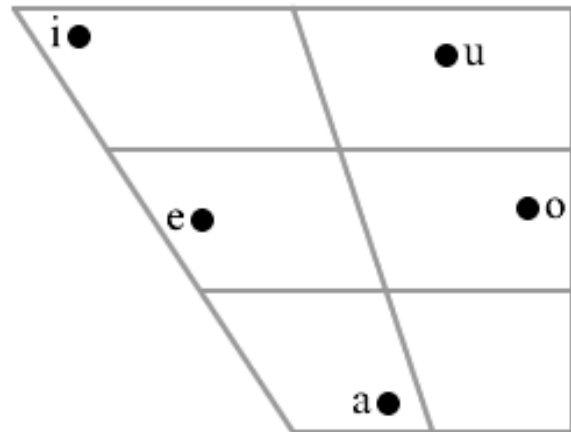
*Table 2: Japanese table of consonants according to place and manner of articulation (cf. Ohata 1994, 6)*

As *Table 1* and *Table 2* illustrate, there are more consonant sounds in the English language than in the Japanese one. Phonemically, only the twelve distinct consonants /p/, /t/, /k/, /b/, /d/, /g/, /s/, /h/, /z/, /r/, /m/ and /n/ are recognized (cf. Iwasaki 2002, 19). In Japanese the fricatives /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ do not exist. Instead, there are the bilabial fricative /Φ/ as in “furu” (which means old) and the palatal fricative /ç/ as in “hito” (which means person) (cf. Iwasaki 2002, 20). The affricatives /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ are also present only in the English consonant system. However, even if /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ are not part of the Japanese language, when /s/, /z/, /t/ and /d/ occur before /I/ and /ʊ/, they are articulated /ʃ/, /ʒ/ and /tʃ/ and /dʒ/. For example, words as “sip”, “see” and “tease” become “ship”, “she” and “cheese” (cf. Ohata.1994, 13). Even if Japanese has the liquid /r/, this does not correspond exactly to the English liquids and it is therefore problematic for Japanese speakers to reproduce /l/ and /r/ in English. Words as “light” and “arrive” might be perceived respectively as “right” and “alive” (ibid., 14). Moreover, because of the fact that in Japanese the sound /v/ does not exist, this is replaced with the bilabial stop /b/, so that “very” may sound like “berry” (ibid.).

In *Fig. 2* and *Fig. 3* are represented the vowel systems of English and Japanese respectively.



*Figure 2:* English RP (Received Pronunciation) vowel system



*Figure 3:* Modern Standard Japanese vowel system

Although it depends on which accent and which linguistic analysis is taken into consideration, it can be said that, as in the case of the consonant sounds, English has more vowel sounds than Japanese (cf. Ohata 1994, 4). In fact, in the Japanese language are present only the high front /i/, the high back /u/, the mid-front /e/, the mid-back /o/ and the low central /a/. Furthermore, English distinguishes between tense vowels, which are pronounced energetically, and lax vowels which are articulated with less breath force (cf. Skandera & Burleigh 2005, 37, 38). Japanese on the contrary, does not make a distinction between lax and tense vowels, so that “sleep”, “taste” and “stewed” are pronounced “slip”, “test”, “stood” (cf. Ohata 1994, 5, 12). Then, the vowel sounds /ʌ/ and /æ/ are also problematic and Japanese learners could make no difference between for example “hut” and “hat” (ibid., 13).

Another area, in which Japanese speakers may have pronunciation difficulties, is represented by the English consonant clusters. While English allows both open syllables (ConsonantVowel) and closed syllables (e.g. CVC, CCVC, CCCVCC), in the Japanese language only open syllables (e.g. CVCVCV) are allowed, so that each consonant must be followed by a vowel. Moreover, a word in Japanese cannot end with a consonant. The consonant clusters are therefore usually unconsciously avoided by Japanese speakers by placing a vowel between the consonants of the cluster (cf. Ohata 1994, 15).

According to Skandera & Burleigh, “the rhythm of a language is the recurrence of prominent elements of speech at what are perceived to be regular intervals of time. Depending on the particular language, the prominent elements are usually either stress or syllables, but they can

also be high pitches, for example, as in the case in many oriental languages” (Skandera & Burleigh 2005, 87). On the one hand English, and Russian for example, are stress-timed languages. On the other hand, Japanese and other languages, such as French and Spanish, are syllable-timed languages (cf. Skandera & Burleigh 2005, 87, 88; Ohata 1994, 15). This means that, in stress-timed languages, the time needed to say something, depends on the number of syllables that receive the stress. In syllable-timed languages, it will be required more or less time to say something, depending on how many syllables are present in the sentence that one wants to say. For example, to say “birds/eat/worms” and “the birds/will have eaten/the worms” it will take the same time. On the contrary, in Japanese to say so/no/to/ri/ha/so/no/mu/shi/wo/ta/be/ta/da/ro/u (16 syllables), it will take longer than to say to/ri/ha/mu/shi/wo/ta/be/ru (9 syllables) (cf. Ohata 1994, 9, 10).

Moreover, in English, stressed syllables are made by pronouncing vowel sounds louder and longer. In Japanese, syllable stress is pronounced with a pitch variation. In fact, “both mora and syllable are necessary units in Japanese phonology” (Iwasaki 2002, 24), in which a mora is defined as a tone bearing unit with constant duration. There are three types of mora: CV (consonant and vowel), N (mora nasal) and Q (mora obstruent) (ibid.). The mora often characterizes the metrical system of traditional Japanese but also modern poetry (e.g. haiku) as shown in the following example:

fu-ru-i-ke ya (5 moras)

ka-wa-zu to-bi-ko-mu (7 moras)

mi-zu-no-o-to (5 moras)

Translated in English:

“An old pond,  
a frog jumps in;  
the resonance of water.”

(Matsuo Bashō 1686, cited in Iwasaki 2002, 25)

Regarding the intonation, it can be said that Japanese and English have features in common such as the final rising intonation (e.g. yes-no question) and the final rising-falling intonation (used for statements, commands or wh-questions). However, Japanese uses different pitch functions in uttering a sentence. Japanese in fact allows less pitch variation than English. For example, if a Japanese speaker wants to say something as a statement, this can be interpreted as a question or the listener may think that the speaker is still speaking (cf. Ohata 1994, 16).



## 5. Conclusion

“A standard variety has fixed grammar and vocabulary, but its pronunciation may vary according to the regional origin, social group, or ethnicity of the speaker. We use the term accent to refer to the way a variety is pronounced” (Skandera & Burleigh 2005, 6). The pronunciation depends of course on the accent and therefore on the origin of the speaker. Even the standard variety, supposed to be “regionally neutral in that it can be found anywhere in a country” (ibid.), has different accent. For example, the Standard British English’s most prestigious accent is the Received Pronunciation (RP) (ibid.).

However, in this paper it has been pointed out that other factors together with the accent influence the for example the age of the learners. After a certain point, around the puberty, it is difficult to improve the L2 pronunciation and this is because the muscles involved in the articulation have developed in such a way that they can produce the sounds of the first language (cf. Yule 2017, 210; Levis 2015, A-42, A-52). Furthermore, children are unlikely to have negative feelings towards a new language, they learn it in an unconscious way, “through exposure alone” (Levis 2015, A-52).

The motivation, be it instrumental or integrative, is also an important factor which influence the pronunciation. Those learners who aspire to become members of the L2 community, are more likely to improve their language skills, especially their pronunciation (cf. Christophersen 1973, 21). Despite that, nowadays, as shown in *Figure 1*, English is mostly spoken by non-native speakers who use it especially as a lingua franca. Those learners have usually no interest in becoming a part of the L2 culture, nor in achieving a pronunciation like that of the native speakers. Moreover, the more the L1 differs from the L2, the more difficult it will be to improve the pronunciation. Every speaker with an L1 that is not English has different difficulties, in particular in reproducing sounds that do not exist in the first language. This has been demonstrated in the last chapter with the analysis of the differences between Japanese and English.

The Jenkins’ Lingua Franca Core (LFC) (cf. Jenkins 1998) is a valid option for those who, for several reasons, do not want to refer to a specific model. In fact, “if learners are enrolled in a class with the intent to learn English for international communication, traditional [native speaker] norms for pronunciation may be less relevant, as the goal is to quickly reach communicative competence rather than to mimic a [native speaker] accent” (Davis 2012, 9).

It is absolutely legitimate to want to have a native speaker accent, if this is also achievable remains doubtful for the various reasons listed above. Finally, why should non-native speakers

want to learn a standard variety, such as the Perceived Pronunciation, that is not even spoken by the majority of them but only by a maximum of 3-4 percent? (cf. Skandera & Burleigh 2005, 6).

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