

論文

Pronunciation Teaching in Elementary English Education

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要旨

周知の通り2020年、日本では小学校での英語教育が大きく変わろうとしている。それを目前に、スウェーデンに本社を置くグローバル企業 EF EPI が88カ国を対象に実施した世界最大英語能力ランキング（2018年）で日本は49位、前年の37位（80カ国中）よりさらに後退した。また能力レベルは「標準的」（2015年）から、「低い」（2016年～2018年）へと後退したままであった。文科省では「小学校外国語活動・外国語研修ガイドブック」を作成し、音声面を中心としたコミュニケーション体験を推奨しているが、実際に現場で指導にあたる教員の英語力の問題など課題は多いと考えられる。国際社会において日本人の英語力、とくにオーラル面を向上させるには、これからはじまろうとしている小学校の英語教育において何が必要であろうか。現在、勤務する大学で英米語学科の学生142人の協力のもとに行ったアンケート結果を踏まえつつ、脳科学の視点も取り入れながら、音声学的な考察を試みた。

キーワード：世界英語能力ランキング、小学校初等英語教育、日本語脳、英語脳、臨界期、発音記号

Introduction

Education First (EF) reported the 8th edition of the rankings of English skills which

has been conducting the tests for millions of adults all over the world, found the data from over one million people in 88 countries in 2017.

It showed that the 1st place was Sweden, 2nd place the Netherlands, 3rd place Norway, and 49th place was Japan as a result. In Asia, the 1st position was Singapore, 2nd position the Philippines, 3rd position Malaysia, and 11th position was Japan. But it is shocking rather than these rankings, Japan was stepped back as ‘low’ in the evaluation of the EF EPI 6th edition for the first time although it has been ‘standard’ since 2011, and again it remained as ‘low’ in the 7th and 8th editions. And it went back from the 35th (the 6th edition) to the 37th (the 7th edition), the 49 (the 8th edition) in the world rankings.

For holding Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (the Ministry, later) under the policy, the facts of this term are there when we emphasize for the skills of English of Japanese people more and receive them more seriously. And in 2020, the English education in a Japanese primary school will be changed largely. Within this situation, to make their skills higher, what do we need? This paper will discuss from the points of views as the brain science, the primary school English education, the phonetic teaching (phonetics), the future premises of the English education in Japan.

Materials and Methods

The Difference of the English Skills in Japan and the World

Table 1 EF EPI SCORES (8th Edition) in Asia and the World¹

| Average and countries | | Scores of EF EPI |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| EF EPI Average | | 53.49 |
| No. 1 in the world | Sweden | 70.72 |
| No. 2 in the world | Netherlands | 70.31 |
| No. 3 in the world | Norway | 68.38 |
| | | |
| No. 1 in Asia | Singapore | 68.63 |
| No. 2 in Asia | The Philippines | 61.84 |
| No. 49 in Asia | Japan | 51.80 |

The scores of English abilities of Japanese people were 51.80 points, and unfortunately, they didn't reach the average scores of EF EPI 53.49. In the executive summary of EF EPI, it says briefly about the problems of the Japanese English education as below.

English learning of the needs of memorization is small compared to the math and science, they don't emphasize on the correctness like those subjects. The English education in Korea, Japan, Hong Kong focuses on the grammatical rules rather than practical and communicative styles, so their grades are not so good. To realize the English skills higher, they have to change the directions of effective educational systems of communicative skills, increasing the conversational practices rather than grammar and vocabularies. (2017 EF EPI EF Scores of English Abilities, p. 23)

A Questionnaire about English from the 1st Year Students to the 4th Year Students

In English, there are 4 skills = (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing), before that though, the Japanese English education was that grammar and reading centered, due to their communicative skills don't rise up. About the comments of EF, it's a vital role to emphasize their communitive skills and effective education.

Now, what do the examinees, the university students think about their English abilities (4 skills)? I asked a questionnaire to the 142 students from the 1st year to the 4th year in the University where I am working for. With the cooperation of the students belonging to the Department of English in the Faculty of Foreign Studies, their major is English, and at least they have a certain confidence and interests of the language more than other students at other departments of their faculties.

Q1. In the 4 skills of English, what is the weakest one?

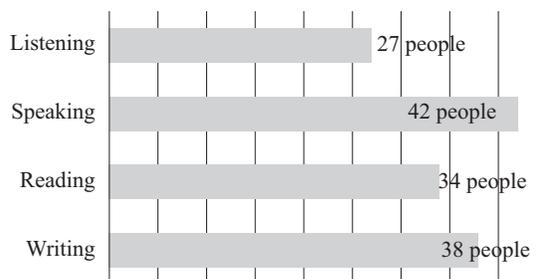


Figure 1.

Q2. In the 4 skills of English, what is the most favorite one?

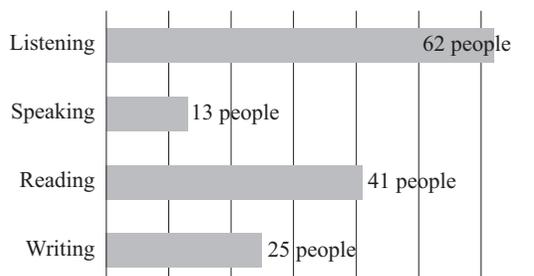


Figure 2.

Q3. In the 4 skills of English, please put a number from 1 to 4 in which you want to improve.

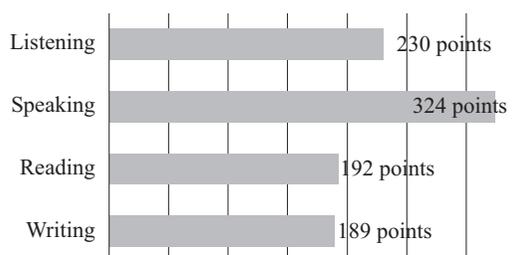


Figure 3. Note. 1 to 4 points, point 2 to 3, 3 to 2 points, aggregate 4 in 1 point.

Q4. You have learned English through high school, have you ever received a pronunciation guidance by providing a special time?

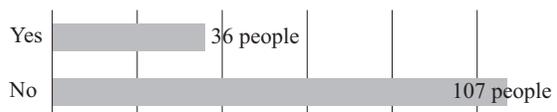


Figure 4.

Note. The people who answered 'Yes', the time of the instruction was at elementary school 13, junior high school 12, and high school 21 (Multiple answers allowed). Among the 28 people from native speakers of English, 5 people who responded, and learned the phonetic symbols, and others who learned about the difference between British and American pronunciation were 0. Other 5 (English conversation school, from a Japanese, from people with many opportunities to talk with foreigners at work, etc.)

Q5. What do you think about accurate and beautiful English pronunciation? (Multiple answers allowed)

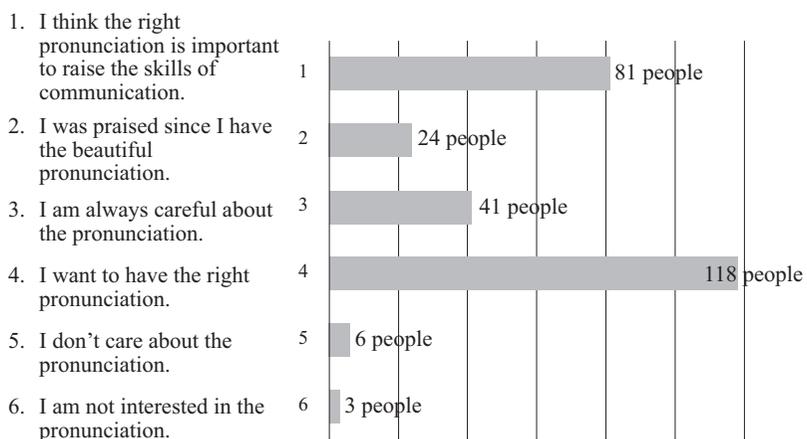


Figure 5.

“An English Brain” and “A Japanese Brain” from the Brain Science

According to Kenichi Uemura, Emeritus Professor at Hamamatsu Medical University, Honorary Chairman of Japanese Medical English Education Association, bilingual people have independent linguistic areas in their brain that responds to English and Japanese.

As shown in FIG. 1, for example, it is the part of “the Japanese Brain” when you are listening to the NHK news, and when you are listening to the news of CNN, the part of “the English Brain” is activated. (Uemura, 2009, p. 26)

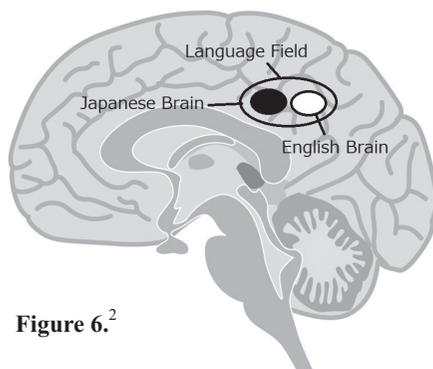


Figure 6.²

He says also as below:

The early childhood to the basic form of the neural network is completed based on the learning experience, the brain cells that have not been used up to that time believed to be a loss, then not possible to be active, this time is the critical period. (p. 25)

A newborn baby has the ability to learn any language in the world, learning the pronunciation is close to being impossible of the language that was not learned after it passed the critical period. The critical period of 5 to 6 years of the language ability to learn to become fully bilingual, the language up to all critical period is the kindergarten of a complete mastery of such as music, art, languages, a Japanese chess, the subsequent learning ability rapidly during the elementary school drops, is stated as too late in junior high school. (2009, Uemura, p. 25)

Apart from making a complete bilingual when a pupil entering a junior high school, ‘the English Ears’ which can hear the difference of special sounds that you cannot find in the Japanese, ‘the English Mouth’ which can talk, and ‘the English Brain’ thinks in English, are all important teaching ways.

Elementary School English Education from 2020

The Japanese elementary school education as we know will be changed largely from 2020. And in the 5th and 6th grades taught as ‘the language activities’ once a week will be a ‘formal subject’ and that will be taught 3 times a week. In addition to the fact ‘the language activities conducted by mainly a self-governing body and a school’ will be obligatory for the 3rd and 4th grades as the language activities.

It’s a little old data, but the comparative charts are easy to know in the Yomiuri Newspaper (Heisei 25) 2013 shown.

Pronunciation Teaching in Elementary English Education

| | Present | | Getting into Practice for 2020 |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--|
| The 5th grade and 6th grade | <p>The Language Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class meeting is once a week. • Learning the language through songs and games. • The class teacher is teaching. | ⇒ | <p>Formal Subject</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class meeting is three times a week. • A learning content of junior high school is in the advancement of the schedule. • Instructing them with reading and writing • Teachers with English major are teaching |
| The 3rd grade and 4th grade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted by mainly a self-governing body and a school. | | <p>The Language Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A required English course. • Class meeting is once and twice a week. |

Figure 7. The Comparative Charts of the Former and Latter Changes from 2020³

It's worried that the English ability of 'the classroom teacher' who will teach the 3rd and 4th grades including his/her pronunciation. From 'the classroom teacher' to 'the teacher with English major' to teach the 5th grades and 6th grades, the teacher's 'pronunciation' should be real as a native speaker of English.

Kenichi Uemura (2009) says:

Because the teacher is not bilingual, his/her pronunciation is not correct, the recorded Tapes, MDs, CDs, DVDs and Videos by the native English speakers can be good vehicles to instruct them to learn the right pronunciation. (2009, Uemura, p. 27)

The phonetic symbols should be taught from the beginning, and they must not use the katakana phonetic symbols. (2009, Uemura, p. 37)

The Situations for the Use of ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) in the Public Primary Schools

English, especially its pronunciation ideally can be taught by the actual native speakers of English, how is the educational situation in Japan? Heisei 27, the Ministry for the “English education implementation status survey (elementary school)” has published the results as follows. Among the public elementary schools 19,931(Heisei 27 December 1) in the survey, the ALT’s total number (assistant language teachers) is 11,439 people, one person to 1.7 schools as a simple calculation. And the features of ALTs are divided as ‘JET program’ 18.6% ‘the self-governing body’ 15.5%, ‘the worker dispatch contract’ 10.8%, ‘the contract work’ 13.8%, ‘others’ 41.4% is the most common, they are native speakers of English and good English speakers in the region included.

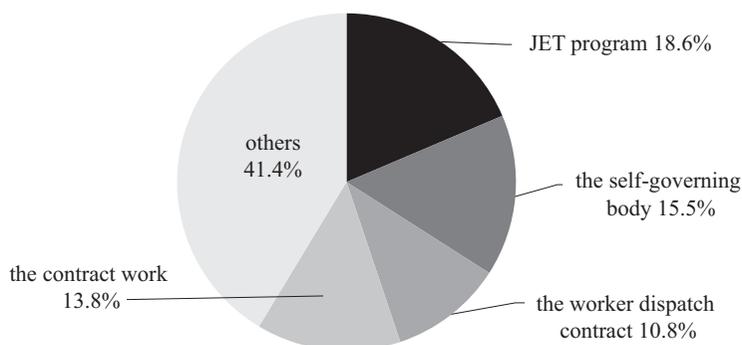


Figure 8. The Use of ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers)

It’s pointed out the problem of the number of ALTs and qualities of them in advanced studies (Tejima, 2011). Not all the ALTs are trained but the fact that they are native speakers of English, so they stand on the teaching places without the knowledge of phonetics.

Pronunciation Teaching to the Japanese Learners Who Passed the Critical Period

And how do we teach phonetics to the Japanese learners and the teachers of English who don’t have confidence?

When I came back from studying phonetics at the postgraduate course at University College London, I taught a junior high school student privately. I taught him English

conversations as well as the way to pronounce the phonetic symbols. One day when I was teaching him English as usual. I got a phone call from a British friend, and had a mischievous mind, switched to the junior high school student to take the phone, and said to him, ‘Say some greetings’, and he said, “How do you do?” Then taking his phone back, the British said, ‘Has an English child come to play?’ What I taught was English pronunciation. The British friend might think he was not American and Canadian, but was ‘an English child’ precisely. And by large, the pronunciation could be heard by a native speaker of English, I told the junior high school student about that, and he was very pleased, and motivated to learn, which was true.

There is a slight difference in pronouncing “How do you do?” in British English. / haʊ du: ju: du: / in American English /haʊ dʊ jʊ dʊ/.

And in the University where I am teaching part-time, I make general classes raise up the 4 skills of English. At these classes, there were 60 students. I have put them into practice to use phonetic symbols since 2018. The students at the two classes, they have never experienced the way of pronouncing rightly with the phonetic symbols.

In this situation, the way of teaching is as follows. At every class, I taught how to pronounce the vowels and consonants. Then showing the way to pronounce the segments, they repeated a few times.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| e.g.) How to Pronounce Vowels | *B=British English *A=American English |
| [ɒ] | |
| My dog is not dodgy. | |
| (B) maɪ dɒg ɪz nɒt dɒdʒi | (A) maɪ dɑ:g ɪz nɑ:t dɑ:dʒi |
| [ʌ] | |
| He’s a lovely young one. | |
| (B) hi:z ə lʌvli jʌŋ wʌn | (A) hiz ə lʌvli jʌŋ wʌn |
| [ə] | |
| That gorilla is eating a banana. | |
| (B) ðæt gɔrɪlə ɪz i:tɪŋ ə bənɑ:nə | (A) ðæt gɔrɪlə ɪz i:ɪŋ ə bənæənə |
| [æ] | |
| Do you happen to have a mac? | |
| (B) du: ju: hæpən tə hæv ə mæk | (A) du: ju hæpən tu hæv ə mæk |

The time range of the teaching was 15 minutes, and 11 times out of 15 as a total. To combine with the visual effectiveness and examples of teaching (hearing certainty) the right pronunciation was paid attention, the attitude of pronouncing the words was done properly.

At the end of the second semester, the presentations were made, let the students put the phonetic symbols in his/ her essay, and read aloud.

This was done as a part of the lessons, so I didn't analyze the detailed data in each segment, but as the result of the tests, I found the improvement of their pronunciation individually started from 0 exercise.

Table 2 The Results of the Oral Tests of A・B Classes

| A class (31 people totally) | | B class (32 people totally) | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| S | 0 people | S | 5 people |
| A | 25 people | A | 27 people |
| B | 6 people | B | 0 people |
| C | 0 people | C | 0 people |

Especially the 5 students who took S(A+) grades made small pronunciation mistakes less than 5% in 10 sentences in an essay.

Because there was a task of a test, other students made some efforts, so they were quite good. That was a level of a former prediction before the pronunciation teaching was done for about 15 minutes of all 11 lessons, so I was very glad for the results. It is an individual difference, but it could be an evidence that the pronunciation teaching is effective. From now on, to think of the examination methods, and take a detailed data, make it clear for the effectiveness and facial tasks. And through this pronunciation teaching, I found the uniqueness of the new task which is intonation. Intonation has some patterns depending on a cognitive approach one by one, it's very difficult to master. Especially the Japanese language is flat in its intonation, the shyness of the Japanese learners bothers here, too. At the two classes, after the pronunciation teaching, I taught intonation to them, I would like to step further in studying the effectiveness and teaching method. The pronunciation teaching I did at the two classes was easy and close to the right pronunciation for them to acquire in a short sentence repeatedly.

Results and Discussion

First, through the questionnaire, I found the fact that at least 26% of the students even though they are with English major, had experienced the pronunciation teaching before the entry to the University. The pre-study was the difference of teaching pronunciation using the textbooks in junior high school (Ueda, Ootsuka, 2010), it is reported that the educational environment which cannot provide the time of pronunciation teaching with the teachers there. And from the questionnaire, many students think about the right pronunciation is important, and they want to have the right pronunciation.

It's necessary that surely for the students with English major and people engaged in the fields of medicine and science who will be leading in the world, and therefore, it is important to raise the ability of English of Japanese people.

And it's very important for the students with English major to improve the skills of speaking for the development although they feel they are not good at it, and for the educational system in which 'the English Brain' during the critical period is advanced.

For acquiring the right pronunciation not trained at present, I think it is quite important to train the children in elementary school. Japanese students are 'shy', so they won't try to get closer to the right pronunciation.

But during the primary school to speak English with right pronunciation is 'normal', you can abolish the cognitive walls as 'being shy.'

And again as Uemura, a brain scientist and bilingual says that in the places for English education in a primary school, we make the children touch the right pronunciation in use of ALTs, CDs and DVDs, quite often. And at the same time, to teach phonetic symbols, and how to pronounce from not only the ears but also the visions. The period to form 'the English ears', 'the English Mouth' and 'the English Brain', we cannot force them to memorize the wrong pronunciation.

The Ministry shows us in "The Elementary School English Foreign Language Activity / Foreign Language Training Guide Book":

The language activities in the new learning and teaching method, we are focusing on growing the basis for communicating with the language from the sounds as well as the language activities in the beginning before the change.' (p.

12) And it says, too,

it's important for the teachers to listen to English and pronounce it with the CDs affiliated to this guide book. And not only in school training but also in an exchanging meeting in the morning, it's good to listen to a part every time, in the decided days, and pronounce English would lead to the motivations of the teachers for raising the practical skills of them. In addition, it is important that every teacher uses the CDs, and practice it. (p. 9)

But the issues are whether a single teacher has 'the English Ears' and 'the English Brain' to hear the right pronunciation or not. If they don't have these characters, those who have passed the critical period, to say to practice with CDs, it is questionable that they can be effective or not.

But to use the native speaker of English, this has a certain limitation.

And I would like the teachers and students who passed the critical period use "the phonetic symbols."

For example, let me introduce the instance to get closer to the native speakers of English through the phonetic symbols how to pronounce rightly although they have passed the critical period. It is effective to get closer to the pronunciation, which is ambiguous from the ears, to ensure the visions and training.

The Ministry made 'The Elementary School Foreign Language Activity / Foreign Language Training Guide Book' in their practice, there is a page 'Classroom English.' (pp. 118-123) The phrases used are taken up in Japanese and English. I think we add phonetic symbols here. And at least for English used in the classrooms, we can teach the right pronunciation close to the native speakers of English. In 'the classroom English' these below phrases are shown, and if you put the phonetic symbols, you can read as follows. (* B)=British English A)=American English)

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1) Good morning. | |
| B) gʊd mɔːnɪŋ | A) gʊd mɔːrɪŋ |
| 2) How are you today? | |
| B) haʊ ɑː juː tədeɪ | A) haʊ ɑːr jʊ tədeɪ |
| 3) It's time for English class. | |
| B) ɪts taɪm fɜː ɪŋɡlɪʃ klɑːs | A) ɪts taɪm fɔːr ɪŋɡlɪʃ klæs |
| 4) Are you ready? | |

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