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Spoken English: Improving Pronunciation through an Applied Drama Project

Abstract:

This study investigated whether Japanese students studying English who participated in an applied drama project emerged with improved pronunciation skills. Students' sketches were recorded and transcribed to identify pronunciation problems so as to make informed interventions in a series of lessons and were again recorded and transcribed after the intervention to assess progress made in addressing the original pronunciation problems. The study also used questionnaires and interviews at the start and end of the course to gauge students' enthusiasm and to analyse their self-assessment. The study concluded that language taught through applied drama supplied a motivation for positive change in the students' pronunciation of English.

1. Introduction-Investigating the problem:

All students graduating from high school in Japan have had at least six years of formal English education. However, most still do not have a good command of spoken English by the time they start university. This anomaly can be explained in part by the fact that most native English speaker teachers working in Japanese schools have fewer teaching hours and less autonomy to embark on experimental teaching that could enhance pronunciation and overall fluency, while Japanese English teachers have many teaching hours but use mainly Japanese as their medium of instruction. As such, Japanese English teachers typically emphasize the teaching of reading and writing and resort to the grammar translation method, which usually creates a teacher-centric classroom, with less opportunity for pronunciation and speaking practice. Miller (2014) commented that:

While English classes are mandatory in Japanese schools, the percentages of students who emerge with actual English abilities are surprisingly low. Perhaps one of the biggest complaints was the amount, or lack of English used in the classrooms. Japanese teachers often teach all the grammar in Japanese, and check that the students can follow the textbook by translating the English into Japanese. Native English teachers are relegated to human tape recorders, and then set free to roam the class and 'help' the students.

This puzzling outcome is the motivation for this study.

1.1 Aim and significance:

The weight of communicative language teaching lies on establishing situations in the classroom in which students employ language in a meaningful way. On communicative competence, Vygotsky and Bakhtin (1962 and 1986) see language as something that gains meaning in interaction and use, rather than as knowledge in the possession of the speaker, which can then be deployed. The use of applied drama in English language teaching is one such way of encouraging the interaction and use of the language as a communicative teaching tool. Applied drama has been defined by many scholars such as Prendergast and Saxton (2013) as a field of dramatic arts practice that is process-based in which spectatorship and performance happen within communities in ways that are private or semi-private for a variety of purposes; and covers a broad range of intentions such as crisis management, professional training, healthcare, anger management, and second-language learning. On the basis of this definition and within the context of language learning, applied drama can enliven a second language learning class, support communicative language practice, and encourage the development of imaginative interchange among learners. It can also act as a platform for pronunciation practice. The effectiveness of the applied drama approach in minimizing students' pronunciation problems in a language learning class is affirmed by Carkin (2003, p.20) who suggests that, "pronunciation study through drama is effective as students will have scripts written with pronunciation reminders, stress and emphasis marks and they will have a 'score' and learn to 'sing' the English as they act." The aim of this project was to investigate whether students who participated in an applied drama project emerged with improved pronunciation and communication skills, which could help them to better, interact with native speakers of English as well as attain international intelligibility. The importance of working on improving students' pronunciation in a bid to foster comprehensibility is underlined by Jenkins (2010, p. 105) when she states that: "the goal of pronunciation teaching should be the sufficiently close approximation of an NS accent such that it can be understood by NSs of that language."

1.2 Practice where the problem was addressed:

A class of twenty-two first year university students aged eighteen and nineteen, majoring in English at Saitama University, was used as the case study for this project. The students have had six years of English education at junior high school and high school. They enrolled in an English conversation course taught once a week for ninety minutes by the author of this study. The course runs for a year (thirty weeks) and the aim is to develop English communicative competence through pair and group activities on a number of high interest topics like *self-introduction, travel, entertainment, family, friends, part time jobs, and studying abroad* among others. The choice of the case study was motivated by the fact that over the past several years, I have had requests from the English majors that I teach to help them improve their English proficiency in general and pronunciation in particular. Students majoring in English generally have high motivation to study arising from their aspirations to become high school English teachers in Japan. Some of the students intend to work in English educational settings in Japan or abroad and others plan to visit, study, work in

other countries, or obtain jobs with international organisations. Because of the drive that the students have to accomplish their future career plans, many of them felt that they needed to improve their English so that it will be intelligible to English speakers around the world. In order to help them improve, I chose an experimental and interactive approach, like the applied drama approach, to determine the pronunciation areas that were problematic for communication and inhibiting comprehension, while keeping them motivated throughout the learning experience. I speculated that the applied drama approach would help me work intimately with students and understand their pronunciation closely and refrain from focusing on pronunciation problems that may not be formally acceptable from a British English or General American English stand point, but would not affect understanding in an English as an International Language context. In relation to pronunciation teaching to non native speakers of English and the whole notion of intelligibility, Jenkins (2010, p. 105) advocates that “pronunciation teaching based on English as an International Language should give the right to speakers to express their L1 regional group identity in English by means of their accent, as long as the accent does not jeopardize international intelligibility.”

1.3 Research questions:

The project set out to answer the following three research questions: 1. From an analysis of an unrehearsed sketch, what pronunciation problems can be identified among my Japanese students? 2. How can these problems be ameliorated? 3. How did the course I taught impact on my students' pronunciation?

2. Methodology:

At the start of the project, I taught a lesson on *self-introduction* on the first day of class and had the students write out a 3-5 minutes sketch in their groups of three students. The lesson content featured useful vocabulary words, questions and conversation strategies appropriate in a self-introductory setting. I chose the topic *self-introduction* because I felt students should know each other well and create a good working relationship since they were going to be working in groups over an extended period of time. I thought the establishment of such a rapport at the beginning of the class was good for group cohesion, which is key when embarking on experimental language learning through a project involving groups. Wright et al., (2006, p.12) echo the importance of self-introduction for group cohesion when they write that, “by asking learners information about their jobs and hobbies with likes and dislikes and by learning names is a necessary condition to establishing familiarity and trust and confidence in the other class members.” I had a total of twenty-two students and made seven groups. The first two classes were devoted to writing the sketches and I moved from group to group to help students create a self introductory story that was coherent and that made use of the necessary vocabulary words, questions and conversation strategies appropriate for a self-introductory meeting. When students had completed the scripts for their sketches, I had them read the scripts in groups and I recorded and transcribed them to identify pronunciation problems so as to be able to make informed interventions in a series of lessons through rehearsals.

For twelve weeks, we dedicated forty-five minutes of each class time to practice reading through the sketches and forty-five minutes to work on the designated course textbook. I used the segmental and suprasegmental features of phonology to address pronunciation problems as well as the IPA phonemic transcription to represent pronunciation more accurately. At the end of the semester, student groups performed their rehearsed sketches in front of their peers and I recorded and analysed them in order to identify the main problematic areas and to quantify and classify students' pronunciation errors from a linguistic perspective. Students' sketches at the beginning and end of the semester were compared and annotated by the students themselves, and later by me. I then chose the sketch of one group (appendix 1) through a randomized draw for my analysis, given the small-scale nature of the study. This study drew from qualitative research methodology, and used questionnaires and interviews (appendices 2-5) at the start and end of the course to gauge students' enthusiasm and analyse their self-assessment. Each student filled out a questionnaire and was interviewed before the start of the project indicating any past experience they have had with the drama approach to language learning in particular and pronunciation teaching in general. At the end of the project, the same students were interviewed and I had them fill out questionnaires about how they felt with the project, if they thought they improved and if they will like to try the same method in the future. Feedback from students triangulated the study providing an emic perspective to add to the etic view of the analysis.

2.1 Ethical/Legal issues:

According to the BAAL (2000) 'Recommendations for good practice in Applied Linguistics student projects,' the following were taken into account: 1. General responsibility to informants: students involved in the project were not required to devote extra time to the project. Interviews, questionnaires, writing of sketches, recording and rehearsal took place during regular class hours or were given as regular homework. 2. Obtaining informed consent: students were informed about the project's aims and goals, as well as the participation desired from them. 3. Respecting a person's decision not to participate: students were asked for their permission to include their written work and spoken opinions in the project, and any refusals were to be complied with. 4. Confidentiality and anonymity: The identities of the students were kept confidential.

3 Questionnaires and interviews:

The questionnaire and interview prior to embarking on the project set out to measure: 1) the frequency in which students were exposed to English with native speakers of English; and 2) how frequently Japanese English teachers used English as the main language of instruction in their junior high school and high school instruction. The questionnaire and interview served as a response to the research problem raised in the study. The results presented in table 1 show that 70 per cent of students said they were often and always taught English by Japanese English teachers more than native English teachers in junior high school and high school (Question 1) and 65 per cent of the students said Japanese English teachers used English in their instruction only occasionally (Question 2).

The response from the questionnaire also confirmed that 65 per cent of students spent more time studying reading and writing than speaking (Questions 3 and 4), and 70 per cent of students rarely received instructions for language learning from native speakers of English during class time (Question 5). Also, 45 per cent of the students said Japanese teachers rarely utilised experimental teaching and taught out of the textbook a few times (Question 6). 40 per cent of the students said on only a few occasions would the native speaker English teacher set exams and give feedback (Question 7). 70 per cent of the students had almost never had experience in extracurricular activities to study English (Question 8). 60 per cent of students have never been abroad for an English study program (Question 9). 70 per cent of the students said they were not satisfied with the way they were taught English in junior high school and high school (Question 10). The findings above are reflected in the table below:

Table 1 (Results of questionnaires before project, Appendix 2)

Questions	1(never)	2(a little)	3(sometimes)	4(often)	5(always)	Total
1	0%	10%	20%	35%	35%	100%
2	5%	20%	50%	25%	0%	100%
3	0%	10%	25%	55%	10%	100%
4	10%	50%	30%	10%	0%	100%
5	0%	70%	30%	0%	0%	100%
6	5%	40%	40%	10%	5%	100%
7	0%	5%	40%	35%	20%	100%
8	35%	35%	25%	0%	5%	100%
9	60%	20%	20%	0%	0%	100%
10	5%	25%	45%	25%	0%	100%

Table 2 below presents results of the interview I had with the students before the start of the project (Appendix 3) and the results conclude that students had no previous knowledge of drama and language education and that most of them felt the drama experience in language learning will be of help to them. Of the 20 students who participated in this interview, 80 per cent had never had any previous experience with drama and language learning (Question 1). 95 per cent felt drama can be a fun activity in learning English (Question 2) while 85 per cent of students answered they were excited to be part of the drama activity (Question 3). 100 per cent students felt drama will enhance their English ability (Question 4). 80 per cent of students acknowledged they were worried about making mistakes (Question 5), and 95 per cent of the students felt the need to improve pronunciation (Question 6). 25 per cent of students said they liked practicing pronunciation (Question 7), but 80 per cent of students felt English pronunciation was difficult to learn (Question 8) and 70 per cent of students were taught pronunciation in Junior high and high school (Question 9). 95 per cent of students were open to studying pronunciation through drama (10). The aforementioned information is summarized in the following data:

Table 2 (Results of interview conducted before the start of the project, Appendix 3)

Questions	Yes	No	Total
1	20%	80%	100%
2	95%	5%	100%
3	85%	15%	100%
4	100%	0%	100%
5	80%	20%	100%
6	95%	5%	100%
7	75%	25%	100%
8	80%	20%	100%
9	70%	30%	100%
10	95%	5%	100%

Table 3 below shows result of questionnaire conducted at the end of the drama project in an attempt to gauge students performance and to answer one of the research questions of the study of how pronunciation study through an applied drama project impacted students' pronunciation. Students felt the project impacted the course positively as 86 per cent of students found the course useful and very useful in learning pronunciation (Question 1). 86 per cent of the students also felt drama was useful in improving pronunciation and speaking (Question 2). 91 per cent of the students were ready to study pronunciation through drama subsequently (Question 3). 95 per cent of the students thought drama was useful in making English fun (Question 4). 82 per cent students felt English through drama made them more confident in English study (Question 5). 87 per cent students said drama was useful in helping them meet the expectation they had before the course (Question 6). 81 per cent of students mentioned that drama in high school would have been useful in improving pronunciation (Question 7). 92 per cent students thought drama would be useful in subsequent classes (Question 8). 91 per cent of students concluded that drama would be useful in improving other areas of English like reading and writing (Question 9) and 64 per cent of students were confident drama would be a useful tool in all classes (Question10). This information is summed up in the following data:

Table 3 (Results of questionnaire conducted at the end of the project Appendix 4)

Questions	1 (not useful)	2 (a little useful)	3 (somewhat useful)	4 (useful)	5 (very useful)	Total
1	0%	5%	9%	50%	36%	100%
2	0%	0%	14%	45%	41%	100%
3	5%	0%	5%	55%	36%	100%
4	0%	5%	0%	45%	50%	100%
5	0%	0%	18%	55%	27%	100%
6	0%	0%	14%	64%	23%	100%
7	0%	0%	18%	36%	45%	100%
8	0%	0%	9%	32%	59%	100%
9	0%	0%	9%	68%	23%	100%
10	0%	5%	32%	50%	14%	100%

Table 4 below shows results of the interview collected reinforced the answer to the research question about how students' pronunciation was impacted through an applied drama study approach. All students enjoyed the experience (Question 1). 82 per cent of students felt their pronunciation improved through drama (Question 2). Though 82 per cent of students were shy prior to participating in the project (Question 3), 86 per cent of students said their pronunciation improved through the drama method of studying (Question 4). 64 per cent of them were worried about making mistakes (Question 5), but 95 per cent of students saw drama as an effective way to learn pronunciation (Question 6). 77 per cent of students thought that through the drama experience they became more confident in English study (Question 7). Regarding the difficulty of learning pronunciation through drama, the students were divided in opinion (Question 8). 77 per cent of students said drama made learning motivating (Question 9) and 82 per cent said they would like to try the drama method of studying again (Question 10). These findings are presented as a summary in the following table:

Table 4 (Results of interview conducted at the end of the project Appendix 5)

Questions	Yes	No	Total
1	100%	0%	100%
2	82%	18%	100%
3	73%	27%	100%
4	86%	14%	100%
5	64%	36%	100%
6	95%	5%	100%
7	77%	23%	100%
8	45%	55%	100%
9	77%	23%	100%
10	82%	18%	100%

4 Problem classifications and text analysis:

Thompson (in Swan and Smith 2001, p. 297) observes that 'Japanese language has a rather limited phonetic inventory both in the number of sounds and their distribution.' As a result, perceiving and producing some English sounds is difficult for Japanese. For Japanese, lip and jaw movement seem to be minimized and many social interactions demand soft speech (Thompson in Swan and Smith 2001, p. 297). This attitude when transferred into the language-learning classroom would limit their enthusiasm to learn and produce English sounds effectively, Thompson argues. In this study, phonology was used to analyze segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation problems. After transcribing students' unrehearsed and rehearsed sketches, I used the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) (International Phonetic Association, 2004-2009) to analyse the words or phrases they highlighted as problematic and categorized them as follows:

4.1 Pronunciation problems- Segmental:

Segmental differences between Japanese and English sound system revealed several problematic areas that students encountered during the drama rehearsal process, especially in the production of English consonant and vowel sounds.

Consonants:

Students had problems with the pronunciation of the labiodental fricative /v/, mainly because this consonant does not exist in Japanese. Thus, students tended to substitute the labiodental fricative /v/ with the voiced bilabial stop /b/ as was the case in this example: S1: *Oh It's very urban isn't it?* For /əʊ its berɪ ɑ:bɑ:n ɪzɑ:n ɪt/. Another example was with the following sentence: S3: *What is your favourite artist?* This sounded as: /wɒt ɪz jəʊ feɪvərɪt ɑ:tɪst/. The substitution of /b/ for /v/ did not cause any miscommunication problems in the drama reading and pronunciation practice process. However, in cases where the words have very similar sounds, if they are not well articulated, the meaning of the words might be misconceived and might create comprehension problems or intelligibility concerns. Another case of substituting a consonant with other similar consonants available, was with the alveolar approximant /r/ and lateral alveolar approximant /l/ consonant sounds. The students often substituted /r/ for /l/ certain times and /l/ for /r/ at others. This is because /l/ and /r/ in Japanese exist as allophones of the same phoneme. Thompson (in Swam and Smith 2001) states that 'l/ and /r/ are both pronounced as a Japanese /r/ (a flap almost like a short /d/ causing confusion in pairs like glamour and grammar.' Because of this interchangeable use of both /l/ and /r/, some words with the consonant /r/ and /l/ did not come across clearly during the drama and pronunciation practice sessions. Such was the case in the following examples: S2: *I didn't sleep well last night.* This sounded like: /aɪ dɪdnt sri:p wel ræst naɪt/. In another example S1 said: *I am great.* However, this sounded like: /aɪ əm gleɪt/. In a further example: S3: *I like listening to music* came across as /aɪ raɪk rɪsənɪŋ tə mʊzɪk/. Students also had difficulty with the pronunciation of words with consonant clusters. Such difficulty is caused by the fact that Japanese does not allow a word to end with a consonant nor permit both initial and final consonant clusters. A word with initial consonant cluster and a closed syllable such as *expert*, S3, was pronounced as 'exiperto' for /ekspɜrt/ by inserting a vowel between the consonant cluster 'xp', and at the end of 'rt' so that the word can conform to the Japanese open syllable pattern of consonant vowel-consonant vowel. Also, the 'th' fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ generated some pronunciation problems during the reading process. Fricatives articulated in the front of the mouth are very difficult for Japanese speakers, most noticeably the two 'th' sounds: /θ/ and /ð/. As stated by Thompson, /θ/ and /ð/ do not exist in Japanese and so they always replace the 'th' sound with the alveolar /s/. An example from the students' transcript was with the following sentence: S2: *Yes, I think so. Where do you live in Tokyo?* This was heard as: /jes aɪ sɪŋ sɔ: wer dʊ jʊ liv ɪn tɔ:kɪəʊ/. In another example, S2 said: *"Shinagawa is urban south area of Tokyo."* This was heard as: /ʃnægəwæ ɪz ərβən saʊs eɪrɪə əv tɔ:kɪəʊ/. Another example was with the sentence of S2: *I love working at Dennys very much because all employees are vey kind and Dennys is work worth doing.* This was heard as: /aɪ lʌv wɜ:kɪŋ æt denɪz veri mætʃ bɪkəz ɔ:l ɪmplɔ:ɪs ɑ:r veri kaɪn ən denɪz ɪz wɜ:k wɜ:s dɔ:ɪŋ/

Vowels:

The production of the schwa sound is necessary for the appropriate reduction of vowels and the weakening of unstressed syllables. However, the vowel production during rehearsal was seen notably in the absence of the schwa sound. Students tended to use /ɑ:/ in place of /ə/ as in the example: S2: *I work at Dennys was heard as: /ɑ: wɜ:k ət denɪz/. Another example was in the sentence: S1: Its very urban isn't it? which was heard as: /ɪts bəri ɑ:bɑ:n ɪzɑ:n ɪt/. A further example was in this sentence: S2: I love working at Dennys very much which was heard as: /ɑ: lʌv wɜ:kɪŋ æt denɪz veri mɑ:tʃ/. The schwa sound in *urban*, *much*, *work*, took the /ɑ:/ sound instead.*

4.2 Suprasegmental- Stress and Rhythm:

Roach (2009, p.74) sees stress as sounds, which require more articulatory effort than others. They are usually perceived as longer, louder, or higher in pitch than other sounds and these features are referred to as prominence. Thompson (in Swan and Smith 2001 p.299) states that Japanese do not have the equivalence of weak unstressed forms and learners tend to stress too many English syllables and give the weak syllables a full pronunciation rather than a reduced one. The vowels in weak forms take the schwa /ə/ sound and are pronounced quickly at a lower volume in comparison to the stressed syllable as was the case in: S2: *All menus are very delicious.* Strong form: /ɔ:l menʊs ɑ:r veri dɪlɪʃəs/. Weak form: /ɔ:l menʊs ɑ:r veri dɪlɪʃəs/. Reduced syllables function to maintain an appropriate rhythm in sentences. However students employed the strong or stressed form in most of their words. This frequent addition of a strong or additional stress on words by students gave their conversations a unique rhythm, which would require a non Japanese English speaker to follow closely in order to understand.

Tone and Pitch:

Students tended to use a rising tone, regardless of the context or the question type. Thompson (2001) explains that with Japanese questions, both 'wh' and 'yes/no' usually have a rise on the utterance final question particle 'ka' and the question tag particle 'ne' to show uncertainty. This is often transferred into English. Some examples were in the following excerpt:

S1: *So where are you from?*

S2: *How about you?*

S3: *What is your favourite artist?*

S2: *My favourite artist is Unizon Square Garden. Do you know?*

S1: *I don't know too. Why do you like them?*

In the drama practice students did not put stress on words that showed emotions and this produced a very flat-sounding monotonous reading at times. This was most evident in the following exchange:

S2: *Wow! Really? I'm from Tokyo too*

S3: *Oh! Me too. I live in Takadanobaba*

Thompson (2001 in Swan and Smith 2001, p.299) suggests that Japanese does not share the English use of intonation to highlight information structure. Students made use of little variation in tone and were unable to make tonic syllable which would have helped to make some of their words more prominent or

to express emotions of surprise like in the example above.

5. Understanding the problem:

My three related research questions asked: 1) what pronunciation problems could be identified among students from an analysis of an unrehearsed sketch; 2) how the problems could be ameliorated; and 3) how the course impacted students' pronunciation. Attempting to seek answers to these questions could reduce learning changes and bring the English language spoken by none native speakers closer to standard. Widdowson (2010, p.86) observes the importance of non-native speaker English staying close to Standard English when he says:

The quality of clear communication and standards of intelligibility with Standard English are assured... If the language disperses into different forms, a myriad of Englishes, then it ceases to serve as a means of international communication in which case the point of learning it largely disappears. As the language spreads, there are bound to be changes out on the periphery, [...] but these changes must be seen not only as peripheral but as radial also and traceable back to the stable centre of the standard.

In the drama practice sessions, which focussed on improving pronunciation, segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation were rough in places, problematic, and hindered fluency. Pronunciation, if not well focused-on therefore could pose a threat to intelligibility. Trudgill (1998, cited in Jenkins 2010 p.105) further reiterates this fear when he says that:

There is a great fear that English is now used so widely around the world and is in particular used by so many non native speakers that if we are not careful and very vigilant, the language will quite rapidly break up into a series of increasingly mutually unintelligible dialects and eventually into different languages.

In light of Thompson's work on this subject, (2001), Japanese pronunciation is arguably influencing the English abilities of the students. Most problematic phonological points sprouted from Japanese language. From the linguistic description carried out in this project, there is attendant evidence that Japanese phonological variations occurred throughout the entire drama practice albeit this did not impede comprehensibility.

6 Addressing the problem:

I used a test-teach-test model to address the students' pronunciation problems. Students' sketches were recorded before and after the intervention in order to assess progress made and the extent to which the drama method was effective in addressing the original pronunciation problems. During the intervention, students in their groups read through their sketches as a cast, experimenting with stress and intonation, and trying to determine where the emphasis should be placed. I read with one group at a time focusing on pronunciation. The goal was to make students aware of their pronunciation problems, the specific vowels

or consonants they mispronounced, and to model the correct pronunciation for them. At the beginning of the training, I went through the phoneme inventory of English with the students, practicing vowel and consonant sounds as well as tongue positions of cardinal vowels. As students read through their lines, I stopped them at places where words were mispronounced, distinguished the particular sound that created the mispronunciation, isolated it, and had the students circle them in their sketches. I then showed the students the proper lip, tongue, and jaw placement for the sound and had students practice until they could reproduce the sound correctly. One case in point was when S1 read: /aɪ raɪk rɪsənɪŋ tə mʊzɪk ɪn maɪ friː taɪm/. The problematic consonant here was the /l/ and /r/ in listening. I had the students circle the /l/ and then had them make the tip of their tongue make contact with the top of their teeth so as to correctly pronounce /l/. To create the /r/ sound, I made sure the tip of students' tongues did not make contact with any part of their mouth. I had them make their lips somewhat rounded though the sides of their tongues may touch their teeth. Also in teaching the students the schwa sound I tried to contrast it with a sound they know which is similar to the schwa, which does not exist in Japanese. Thus, when teaching them how to pronounce the schwa sound in 'delicious,' for example in S2: *All menus are very delicious*, /ɔ:l menʊs a:r vɛrɪ dɪlɪʃəs/, I did so by contrasting it with the sound /ɑ:/ which they often use to replace the schwa sound. I had students repeat after me in sequences of the sounds such as:

ah-ah-**uh** **uh-uh**-ah ah-ah-**uh**-ah-ah ah-**uh**-ah-**uh**-ah-**uh**

This contrast introduced the schwa sound in a lively manner, which the students found hilarious and fun during drama readings. Moreover, addressing the problem was less threatening in the drama context, because the students were working in groups, and this gave me a chance to walk around the class serving as a member of each group or as group leader of each group. By adopting the role of facilitator, took away the intimidation factor by allowing the students time to explore the sound working alongside their group members. Following the above drills and in my analysis of the second recording post rehearsals, I found my students were more conscious of their pronunciation and made significant effort to articulate and give their conversations a clearer pronunciation void of problems. This effort is classified in the following table in which pronunciation problems resulting from the transcript pre intervention are contrasted to those post intervention to show successful attempts in pronunciation:

Table 5 (Results of pronunciation problems pre and post intervention and success made)

Pronunciation Problem	Transcript pre-intervention	Transcript post- intervention		Improvement percentage of the pronunciation problem
		Percentage rate of how the pronunciation problem is wrongly used in the spoken transcript post-intervention	Percentage rate of Successful attempts of the pronunciation problem in the spoken transcript post-intervention	
Consonant substitution / v/ /b/	10	60%	40%	20%
Consonant substitution /r/ /l/	36	61%	39%	22%
Epenthesis	3	0%	100%	100%
'th' fricatives /θ/ and /ð/	6	33%	67%	33%
Vowel lengthening	6	83%	17%	67%
Rising tone	9	0%	100%	100%

The above data shows that mapping the way forward to improving pronunciation is challenging but possible.

6.1 Recommendations for further practice:

Since English is an essential tool for studying and working internationally, it is important that students be encouraged to find effective means of studying the language, not only in the classroom, but also outside of the classroom. Some useful resources for teaching and learning English pronunciation include: watching English language films without subtitles, watching foreign TV channels like the BBC or CNN, listening to podcasts in order to increase receptive skills, and when possible, conversations with 'foreigners.'

6.2 Research difficulties:

Students were sometimes unavoidably absent from class, which either slowed the progress of the project or the progress of group members. In addition, efforts to get administration to move the classroom to a larger one without desks fixed to the floor were sometimes unsuccessful, because of conflict with classroom scheduling. Thus, on a few occasions the small size of the classroom and the immovable desks made movement for drama-based English learning activity

challenging. The English department's rule to follow the prescribed textbook for the course, culminating in testing students understanding of material covered in the textbook, made it difficult to devote the whole ninety minutes of each class to exploit the details of drama and language education. Devoting forty-five minutes each for drama work and textbook studies was a practical difficulty.

6.3 Limitations of the Project:

Students took the TOEIC test as a placement test and their scores reflected their proficiency to join the course. However, because this test is a multiple choice test and tests only reading and listening, some students emerged with a high score, but a score which did not reflect their current speaking ability and vice versa. Also a few students have had overseas experience and others had studied English as an after school activity in language schools prior to starting university study. The class, therefore, had students with mixed ability, which I considered as the biggest limitation of the project.

7. Conclusion:

This study has shaped my interest in teaching Japanese students more practically. Carrying out this project from an ethnographic perspective, moving from context to text has enabled me to gain insights into Japanese students' English pronunciation. In view of the analysis, one can say that tongue placement as well as articulation differences account for the vast majority of segmental contrasts between Japanese speakers and standard varieties of spoken English. In addition, the students' L1 suprasegmental features tended to interfere with their ability to recognize where and how to use stress and tone in sentences or in individual syllables. Helping students to notice these differences through an applied drama project enabled them to emerge with better pronunciation skills in particular and improved oral communication skills in general. Pronunciation taught through applied drama is effective in that it provides students with motivation to master the sound even if that motivation is purely for the sake of performing in front of their peers. In conclusion therefore, pronunciation taught through an applied drama project supplied a motivation for positive change in the students' pronunciation of English.

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Appendix 1: Transcript

- S1: How is it going?
 S2: Not so good
 S1: What is the matter
 S2: I didn't sleep well last night
 S1: Oh that's too bad
 S2: How about you?
 S3: I'm good
 S1: I'm great. My name is Keisuke
 S2: My name is Haruka
 S3: My name is Natsuki. Nice to meet you
 S1/2: Nice to meet you too
 S3: Where are you from?
 S1: I'm from Tokyo
 S2: Wow, really? I'm from Tokyo too
 S3: Oh me too. I live in Takadanobaba
 S1: Oh It's very urban isn't it?
 S3: Yes I think so. Where do you live in Tokyo?

S2: I live in Shinagawa. Shinagawa is Urban South area of Tokyo

S1: You live in Shinagawa. I live in Nerima. It's very rural. I envy guys. By the way I join weight lifting club so I do training when I- in my free time. What do you like doing in your free time Haruka?

S2: um I like listening to music

S3: What is your favorite artist?

S2: My favorite artist is Unizon sqaue garden. Do you know?

S3: Sorry I don't know

S1: I don't know too. Why do you like them?

S2: Because I like the drummer of them. My hobby is playing the drum. What do you like doing in your free time Natsuki?

S3: These days I'm too busy working part time so in my free time I sleep

S1: What is your part time?

S3: I work at Macdonald. I started working when I was 16 so I am expert at making hamburgers. Do you like Macdonalds?

S1: Yeah I love it. I love chicken crisp. It's only 100yen and it tastes good

S2: Well I seldom go to Macdonalds. I often go to family restaurants. Especially I like Dennys. Dennys has many menus and all menus is so delicious

S1: um I have never been to Dennys. I want to go to Dennys

S2: Actually I work at Dennys. Almost my friends don't like working but I love working at Dennys very much because other employees are very kind and Dennys is work worth doing. I am going to work at Dennys from 8 pm today

S3: What it's 7 pm now

S2: Oh No. I have to go. Nice talking with you

S1/S2: You too

Appendix 2: Questionnaire Pre intervention

Dear student,

I hope you can spend some minutes of your time to answer the following questions. Please answer honestly each of the following questions about your Junior high school and high school English experiences and study habits, as you get ready to participate in the drama workshops.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Please circle only one number (1-5) for each of the items below. 1 for 'never' and 5 for 'always'

1 = never

2 = a little, occasionally

3 = sometimes

4 = often

5 = always

Gender: (a) Male (b) Female

Age: (a) 18-19 (b) 20 and above

1. How often were you taught English by a Japanese?

- 1—2—3—4—5
2. How often did your Japanese English teacher use English in teaching?
1—2—3—4—5
 3. How often did you study reading and writing?
1—2—3—4—5
 4. How often did you practice speaking?
1—2—3—4—5
 5. How often were you taught English by a native speaker of English?
1—2—3—4—5
 6. How often did your teacher teach out of the textbook?
1—2—3—4—5
 7. Did your teacher set English exams, corrected them and gave you feedback?
1—2—3—4—5
 8. Did you belong to any extracurricular English study activities like drama, speech or debate?
1—2—3—4—5
 9. Did you participate in any study abroad, overseas homestay or school trips overseas?
1—2—3—4—5
 10. Are you satisfied in the way you were taught English in junior high school and high school?
1—2—3—4—5

Appendix 3: Interview pre intervention

Dear student,

I hope you can spend some minutes of your time to answer the following interview questions. Please answer honestly each of the following questions, as you get ready to participate in the drama workshops. Please answer 'yes' or 'no'. Thank you for your cooperation.

Gender: (a) Male (b) Female
Age: (a) 18-19 (b) 20 and above

1. Have you ever participated in an English drama project?
Yes or No
2. Do you think drama can be a fun activity for English study?
Yes or No
3. Are you shy to participate in a drama project or are you excited about it?
Yes or No
4. Do you think participating in drama will enhance your English ability?
Yes or No
5. Are you worried about making mistakes in class
Yes or No
6. Do you think you need to practice pronunciation?
Yes or No
7. Do you like to practice pronunciation?

- Yes or No
8. Do you think English pronunciation is difficult to learn?
Yes or No
9. Were you taught English pronunciation in junior high and high schools?
Yes or No
10. Would you like to study pronunciation through drama?
Yes or No

Appendix 4: Questionnaire post intervention

Dear student,

I hope you can spend some minutes of your time to answer the following questions. Please answer honestly each of the following questions about your English experiences and study habits following your participation in the drama workshops.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Please circle only one number (1-5) for each of the items below. 1 for 'not useful at all' and 5 for 'very useful'

1 = not useful at all

2 = a little useful

3 = somewhat useful

4 = useful

5 = very useful

Gender: (a) Male (b) Female
Age: (a) 18-19 (b) 20 and above

1. Do you think the drama method was useful in learning pronunciation?
1—2—3—4—5
2. Do you think the drama method was useful in improving your pronunciation and speaking practice?
1—2—3—4—5
3. In subsequent classes do you think drama would be a useful tool to continue to improve pronunciation?
1—2—3—4—5
4. Do you think drama was useful in making English fun?
1—2—3—4—5
5. Do you think English study through drama is useful in making you more confident in your English study?
1—2—3—4—5
6. Do you think drama was useful to meeting all the expectations you had before the course?
1—2—3—4—5
7. Do you think drama in junior and high school would have been useful in improving your English?
1—2—3—4—5
8. Do you think drama was useful in interacting well with your classmates?

1—2—3—4—5

9. Do you think drama can be useful to improve on other areas of English like reading and writing?

1—2—3—4—5

10. Would drama be a useful tool in all-English classes?

1—2—3—4—5

Appendix 5: Interview post intervention

Dear student,

I hope you can spend some minutes of your time to answer the following interview questions. Please answer honestly each of the following questions following your participation in the drama workshops. Please answer 'yes' or 'no'. Thank you for your cooperation.

Gender: (a) Male (b) Female
Age: (a) 18-19 (b) 20 and above

1. Did you enjoy the drama experience?
Yes or No
2. Do you think your pronunciation improved through drama?
Yes or No
3. Were you shy participating in the drama project or were you excited about it?
Yes or No
4. Do you think participating in drama enhanced your English ability?
Yes or No
5. Were you worried about making mistakes in the drama workshop?
Yes or No
6. Do you think drama is an effective way to learn pronunciation?
Yes or No
7. Do you think drama workshop made you more confident in speaking English?
Yes or No
8. Do you think English pronunciation is difficult to learn through drama?
Yes or No
9. Do you think drama made the whole learning experience motivating?
Yes or No
10. Would you like to study pronunciation through drama again?
Yes or No