**English spoken by Japanese students: its intelligibility for four cohorts of evaluators**

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As English becomes the global language, the crucial issue has become the intelligibility of the message and it has been argued that teachers should focus on the teaching of sounds that help to achieve this (Jenkins 2000). But we need to ask: intelligibility for whom? The question is whether intelligibility differs according to different types of evaluators. We should also investigate pronunciation problems to enhance intelligibility.

This study compared the evaluation of four Japanese speakers’ spoken English. Speeches of 2 minutes long were memorized and delivered by 2 upper intermediate and 2 lower intermediate proficiency level students. The presentation was recorded and played back to four cohorts of evaluators, which comprised: 25 native English teachers, 20 native non-teachers, 15 non-native English teachers and 20 non-native non-teachers, with B1 level on the CEFR. These evaluators listened to the speeches twice, first evaluating their intelligibility and second, analyzing areas where pronunciation could be improved to enhance speaking skills.

The results showed that three of the four cohorts agreed to the ranking order for the Japanese speakers’ intelligibility in English. The exception was the native non-teachers' group. They gave higher scores to a student who spoke passionately about the catastrophe of using atomic bombs, even though she lost fluency because she forgot some of the words in the middle of her rehearsed speech. By contrast the non-native non-teachers were less affected by the speech content and focused on the intelligibility, of which they were severe judges. In common with other cohorts, some of them also identified pronunciation problems such as consonant clusters. Non-native teachers were found to share the native English speakers’ evaluation approach, but tended to give more general advice such as “attention to linking sounds” than evaluators in other groups. The paper explores possible pedagogical implications of these findings.

**Keywords:** Speaking, evaluation, intelligibility, pronunciation

**References**

Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an International Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.