

Speech Script

Hello, everyone. My name is Rimi Furugo. I'd like to talk about learning English. I did a speech on this topic last semester at school, and I feel like I really want to share my thoughts on this issue with more people, so I decided to enter this speech contest.

The question I've been thinking about is: should Japanese students try to speak English like a native speaker?

At first, I just took it for granted that Japanese students should try to speak English like native speakers, but recently I have changed my mind. I would like to illustrate the reasons behind this change by sharing some of my experiences.

I have been studying English since I was 6 years old. I attended an English cram school until I graduated from high school, and we often had lessons with visiting native speakers. This provided me with many opportunities to speak with people from other countries, not only from the United States but also from Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Jamaica. I used to enjoy chatting with these teachers after the lesson time had finished – it was fun, and great conversation practice.

During these conversations, I noticed that they spoke English in different ways depending on where they were from, despite it being the same language. For example, the teacher from the UK spoke with a British accent, whereas the teacher from Jamaica had a Caribbean accent. I got used to listening to them because each teacher came to the school quite often.

Because of this experience I came to believe that it is important to be exposed to various forms of English.

Also, at the weekends I work part-time in at a convenience store. Because Okinawa is a popular tourist destination, people from many different countries often come into my convenience store.

When it's clear that they speak English, I start my communication with them in English. But what if they are Asian? It's often hard to tell if they are from Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, or even from mainland Japanese. So usually, I first try speaking in Japanese. If that doesn't work, I switch to English and ask them, for example, "Do you need a bag?" However, quite often they won't understand my English – when that happens, I modify my words and ask, "Shopping bag? Plastic bag? One bag?" If they still don't understand, I may change my pronunciation and accent, like saying 'beg' instead of 'bag' because this is actually Korean English. Here I'm using English as a lingua franca (a Lingua Franca is a common language used by speakers of different languages), and it's more important to understand each other than to speak English perfectly.

These two stories show that I have two situations where I use English. One is when I want to speak with native speakers, and the second is when I am helping non-native English speaking tourists

From these experiences, I have concluded two things:

Firstly, I believe that it is important to be exposed to various forms of English.

Secondly, I think it is more important to understand each other than to speak English perfectly.

I am aiming to become an English teacher and I'm currently taking a teacher training course at this university, so I've been thinking about whether Japanese people should strive to speak English like native speakers, and also how I should teach. Although I speak with an American English accent influenced by my English cram school, in reality, I believe it is a blend of Japanese English and American English. Personally, my choice as a learner has always been to try to learn to speak like an American native speaker, because I think it's good to have a core accent that I learn and can speak consistently, and it serves as a good long-term objective for me.

However, as a teacher I don't believe it is appropriate to force students to speak like native speakers – I think it's more important for students to concentrate on learning to communicate –

they will have the chance to learn a more native-like accent later on, if they for example go to study abroad. But in classrooms in Japan, I think it's better for teachers and students to concentrate on communication and not worry so much about accent.

What are your thoughts on this matter? Do you have any questions or additional insights? I hope you will write your opinion about learning and teaching English on your reflection sheet.

Thank you for listening.