

〈Research Note〉

Pronunciation Instruction in Culturally Diverse Multilingual EFL Classrooms: A Focus on Suprasegmentals

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Abstract

In this study, I will examine the unique pronunciation needs of four intermediate-level students from different linguistic backgrounds. Due to the increasingly diverse nature of many EFL classrooms in Japanese universities, I will argue that maximum instructional benefit is achieved through a focus on the suprasegmental features of pronunciation as opposed to a remedial approach to isolated segmental aspects. Although an approach focusing on suprasegmentals would also be effective in more homogeneous monolingual EFL settings, it is especially appropriate in classes with students from diverse backgrounds with divergent needs. In such contexts, a focus on suprasegmental features of pronunciation emphasizes communicative intelligibility.

Keywords: Pronunciation, suprasegmental, segmental, multilingual, intelligibility

Introduction

The status of pronunciation teaching is an undervalued part of language education. Derwing and Munro (2005) refer to it as having long been “marginalized within the field of applied linguistics” (p.379), and this despite the fact that the phonological features of language are included within grammatical (or formal) competence which is the first of the four competencies identified in Canale and Swain’s (1983) influential model of communicative competence. However, pronunciation instruction appears to be making great strides forward in recent years. Dabic (2010) observes, “In the 21st century pronunciation has finally become an essential element of language instruction and has taken its long overdue place in teaching ESL/EFL” (p. 20). With respect to Japanese learners of English, advances have been made in pronunciation research with specific regards to these learners. Kashigawa and Snyder (2008) examined Japanese pronunciation and how it affects intelligibility. Koike (2014) has described the suprasegmental features of the

Japanese language and the effectiveness of explicit instruction in dealing with pronunciation problems for Japanese students of English. Diaz (2017) also highlights the positive impact that explicit instruction of suprasegmentals has for the Japanese learner. Yet, in an ever-changing global environment, classroom dynamics are also changing. Despite the enduring image of Japan as a monolingual, monocultural society, the number of international students from abroad has been increasing in Japanese universities making our EFL classrooms more diverse, but also more pedagogically challenging, especially with regard to the teaching of pronunciation. Where once the instructor could focus on the specific needs of Japanese learners, the more multilingual and international composition of EFL classes in Japanese universities presents pronunciation teachers with new challenges. Although this can have an extremely positive impact on communication between students in the classroom, how does it affect teaching strategies, especially those regarding pronunciation instruction? In this paper, I will describe challenges relating to pronunciation instruction in an increasingly multilingual EFL classroom. Specifically, I will focus on the pronunciation needs of intermediate to upper-intermediate students participating in Kochi University's EPIC Program, an intensive course of study popular among both Japanese and regular full-time foreign students from several different countries.

Context

Kochi University has a student population of about 5000 students. Of these, in 2017 there were 45 foreign exchange students (*koukan ryugakusei*) who study at the university for periods of six months or one year. In addition, in 2017 there were also 85 full-time regular students of foreign nationality. While this may not seem to be a large number of foreign students overall, many of these students take General Education elective English classes, and other English classes at the faculty level. The foreign students who participated in the research for this paper were all regular full-time foreign students enrolled in Kochi University's EPIC Program. The EPIC Program is a course that involves six 90-minute classes per week and is taught by three native English speaker teachers for one 16-week semester. The students are of an intermediate to upper-intermediate level and class size usually ranges from 10-15 students, an appropriate learning environment and class size for pronunciation

instruction focused on communicative intelligibility. To ensure that students' level of language competence matches the EPIC Program's intended curricular outcomes, acceptance into the course is determined by both oral and written tests. Due to the relatively high English level required, the course is very popular with foreign students who are keen to develop or maintain their English skills in a study environment that is, for them, otherwise focused on improving their Japanese skills. The EPIC Program is open to second, third, and fourth year students from all faculties and the relatively high participation rate of international students has a motivating effect on the class as a whole with its highly communicative orientation. Although data for this research was collected exclusively from students taking part in the EPIC course, other English classes at the university are also increasingly attracting more foreign students, especially short-term foreign exchange students. This is especially the case with *koukan ryugakusei* exchange students seeking to balance a study schedule that leans heavily on the side of classes held in Japanese. The teaching principles presented in this paper, based on best practices from recent work in pedagogic phonetics and phonology, have also been applied in many of these other English classes.

Method

Language data was collected from four interviews with EPIC students recorded on a digital device. The nationalities of the interviewees were Japanese, Nepalese, Indonesian and Chinese. To gather speech data samples, each student was asked questions regarding education culture in their home countries (see appendix 1 for interview questions). This topic was chosen because it is a subject that all students are familiar with, and can speak on at some length. Students were not given the questions in advance, and therefore the speech data is a relatively spontaneous sample. It was intended that these unplanned samples would provide a more natural and representative stream of discourse by which to examine the actual language ability of the students - what Ur (1996) refers to as “‘intuitive’ pronunciation” samples (p. 50). Samples of the students' discourse were taken after the 3-minute mark of the interview to decrease the effect of nervousness in the interlocutor's speech. Each interview was approximately 12 minutes in length and the recordings were transcribed.

Analysis of Pronunciation Features

Japanese speaker

What immediately becomes obvious when analysing the speech sample provided by the Japanese speaker is that the segmental features of pronunciation can be problematic. The typical issues for the Japanese learner of English, such as the consonant /r/, and also the distinction between /b/ and /v/ are problematic as the English consonants /v/ and /r/ have no equivalent in the Japanese sound system. We see L1 transfer of the Japanese ら (ra) /r/ (alveolar tap) when pronouncing words such as *graduation*, and also what is closer to a ふ (fu) /ɸ/ (voiceless bilabial fricative), similar to the English /f/, at the end of *have*, rather than the English /v/. Furthermore, with regards to vowel pronunciation, the five monophthongs that are a feature of Japanese, limit the Japanese speaker's ability to adequately deal with the 15 vowel sounds that exist in English. *Have* /hæv/ is pronounced /hʌf/, resembling the Japanese ゃ(a) vowel sound in the utterance *I didn't have enough chance to communicate with foreigners*. There are also instances of using monophthongs where diphthongs are required. When pronouncing *fail* /feɪl/, rather than the diphthong /eɪ/, the vowel is pronounced using the monophthong /ɛ/.

While there is no doubt that these segmental pronunciation features require explicit instruction, the suprasegmental features of the Japanese interlocutor's speech also potentially impede intelligibility, and this is the area that has been selected for specific pedagogical focus. Two areas where this is most apparent are in syllable stress in individual words (lexical stress), what McCarthy (1991) terms prominence, and prosodic stress, which is sentence-level stress. In longer words such as *elementary*, the speaker places equal prominence on each syllable rather than placing the stress at the beginning (secondary stress) and in the middle (primary stress) of the word *ele**MEN**ntary*¹. This can have the effect of making the word unclear in communicative use. Stress is also evenly, and therefore unnaturally, distributed throughout longer sentences. One example of this is when the speaker says that, *I think almost all Japanese young people will go to university*. Equal emphasis has

¹ Although the IPA uses a different system to represent stress, I have chosen a visual representation whereby primary stress is indicated with capital letters and secondary stress is represented using bold case. The intention was to allow for greater ease of understanding.

been given to all words rather than making the distinction between which words receive primary and secondary stress *I think almost All Japanese YOUNg people will go to university*. An absence of linking or liaison (the linking of a word's final consonant with a vowel at the beginning of the next word) is also apparent where the speaker neglects to link words such as *a lot of* in the sentence *We studied a lot of grammar*. By phrasing each word separately, it sounds like *a-lot-of* rather than the linked *a-lo-tof*.

Indonesian speaker

In the Indonesian speaker's pronunciation, problematic segmental features can at times be seen to impede intelligibility. The first of these is the omission of the /d/ at the end of words. Examples of this include use of *an* /æ:n/ instead of *and* /ænd/, *col* /kɔ:l/ instead of *cold* /kɔ:ld/ and *en* /ɛ:n/ instead of *end* /ɛ:nd/. Also, due to the /v/ phoneme being pronounced like an /f/, sentences such as *the end of elementary school* could potentially cause comprehension problems due to the linking of the two words "end" and "of". The resulting sound was something resembling /ɛnɒf/ rather than /ɛnd ɒv/. Although linking *end* and *of* is correct, the omission of the final consonant makes the link difficult to understand. The pronunciation of /θ/ was also problematic as it was substituted with a /t/ which rendered *three* to sound like *tree*, and *thirty* /θɜ:rdi/ to sound like /tɜ:rti/. Other phonemes that may lead to issues of intelligibility for this Indonesian speaker were vowels. The /æ/ phoneme in *national* was pronounced with a diphthong /neɪfənəl/ instead of a monophthong, which may have been an instance of L1 transfer error, indicating an absence of the monophthong /æ/ in the Indonesian language. The other possibility is that it is a mispronunciation, adding /nəl/ at the end of /neɪfən/ (nation).

Any issues with suprasegmental features of the Indonesian speaker's speech again centered around problems with stress. Although some effort is made by the speaker to emphasize lexical stress, it would occasionally be on different syllables than a native speaker of English would place it on. One such example was the use of the word *emphasis* where the stress was put on the end syllable, *emphaSIS*. The stress for *emphasis* should be on the first syllable *EMphasis*. In a similar way, prosodic stress is evident in the interlocutor's speech but again it differs slightly to the stress of a native speaker. The interlocutor makes the comment *It's very HARD for*

her to pass IT. Although there is the small chance that the speaker may purposefully wish to place stress on these places to emphasise a point, the more natural stress would be *It's VErY HARd for her to PAss it*. This would be unlikely to lead to issues of comprehension, however, and the presence of correct prosodic stress at other times made the interlocutor's speech generally easier to comprehend.

Chinese speaker

In spite of both segmental and suprasegmental problems, the Chinese interlocutor is a relatively fluent speaker of English and able to express himself clearly. The first segmental problem that becomes apparent is the difficulty in pronouncing the /θ/ phoneme. In the words *something* and *three*, the inability to pronounce /θ/ leads to it being substituted with an /s/. Therefore, we hear /sʌmsɪŋ/ and /sri/. Although we can understand the speaker from the context, intelligibility issues could arise as a result of this mispronunciation, for example *sink* /sɪŋk/ instead of *think* /θɪŋk/ or *sing* /sɪŋ/ in the place of *thing* /θɪŋ/. There is also a problem with consonant clusters. The first of these is *words* /wɜːrdz/ which is pronounced /wɜːrs/, the /dz/ being substituted with /s/. The second is *cold* /kəʊld/ which sounds like *code* /kəʊd/ due to the omission of the /l/. Again, there is the potential for miscommunication as the omission of the /l/ renders the intended *cold* a different English word, *code*.

With regards to suprasegmental features, the speech of the interlocutor displayed intonation patterns that reproduced natural English rhythms rather well, and some that may have been instances of L1 transfer errors. In response to a question posed, the interlocutor replied "*It's a HARd QUESion to ANSwer*", correctly placing no stress on the article and the "to" (function word) while stressing the adjective, subject and the main verb. There were occasions, however, where secondary stress was omitted from words such as *eduCation*. The interlocutor's failure to stress the beginning of the word *eduCation*, however, while veering from the natural rhythm of English, would probably not have serious implications for the word's intelligibility or communicative intent, though it may contribute to a speaker's accent. Similarly, the rising intonation at the end of words such as *university* ↑ would be more commonly associated with the intonation used for asking a question, and give the pitch of the speaker a slightly 'unnatural' sound

without impeding comprehension.

Also, in utterances such as *You cannot enter in to university if you do not pass* there is an unnatural feel because of a stilted rhythm and lack of elision. Function words (*in, to* and *if*) are given equal stress, perhaps due to L1 transfer of rhythm and there is no evidence of primary or secondary stress.

Nepalese speaker

Perhaps because of considerable differences in phonology between English and Nepalese, there were many segmental errors that led to some more serious intelligibility issues with the Nepalese speaker. The most obvious of these was the tendency to pronounce fricatives as plosives. In the sentence *Now they have a grade system, they /ðeɪ/* sounds more like *day /deɪ/*. Due perhaps to imprecise pronunciation of the /d/ in *grade* or unnatural intonation, it is unclear if it is a *grade system* or a *great system*. Another example of this fricative and plosives problem is when using numbers. *Forty-five /fɔːti faɪv/* sounds like */pɔːti paɪb/*. Also, as a result of errors involving diphthongs and monophthongs, meaning can at times be unclear. An example of this is in the sentence *Every day we have to take the same subjects. Take* sounds more like *tick* as the diphthong /eɪ/ is pronounced as a monophthong /ɛ/. The same problem arises in the word *same* with the diphthong /eɪ/ pronounced as a monophthong, creating /sem/ rather than /seɪm/.

Although it may be assumed that many of these segmental errors are not so great that they would impede comprehension, when combined with suprasegmental errors they lead to a more pressing intelligibility issue. An example of incorrect lexical stress can be seen in the utterance *We can write report*. The word *report* is enunciated *REport*, with the stress on the beginning rather than the middle of the word *rePORT*. The pitch of the speaker also varies considerably from the pitch of a native English speaker. There is more falling and rising intonation than found with the other interviewees, yet this appears to be placed at different parts of the sentence, sometimes making the speaker difficult to follow. Also, prosodic stress varies. The sentence *A MINimum Of eLEven SUBjects Is compPULsory*, equal stress is given to each word from the beginning of the sentence, including the article and the function word *of*, to the end, with no recognition of secondary stress. A more natural rhythm would be *a minimum of eLEven SUBjects is compulsory*. The absence of elision can

also lead to difficulty in understanding particular words such as *comfortable in the classrooms are not as comfortable*. The student's pronunciation sounds like /kʌmfətəbl/ rather than the more natural /kʌmftəbl/. This is perhaps an example of spelling influencing a speaker's pronunciation.

Explicit Instruction of Pronunciation

There are many issues pertaining to the instruction of pronunciation, not the least of which is whether it should be explicitly taught. There appears to be a growing body of empirical evidence, however, to suggest that it should. Saito (2011), in a study of 20 Japanese ESL students, noted that after four hours of explicit instruction in English segmentals, comprehensibility in the group of students receiving instruction improved significantly, though accents were not affected. Similarly, Couper (2006) reports that pronunciation errors halved in tests done after explicit instruction was given to a group of immigrant students in New Zealand. Gordon et al. (2013) in a study of three groups receiving explicit segmental instruction, explicit suprasegmental instruction, and no explicit instruction, respectively, also recorded improvement in scores for the explicit suprasegmental instruction group in the area of comprehensibility. These studies seem to indicate improved pronunciation skills are therefore more likely to be the result of explicit instruction, especially when this instruction is geared primarily toward the suprasegmental features of language.

Segmental vs Suprasegmental

While there does appear to have been some movement away from the teaching of segmentals as the primary form of pronunciation instruction over the last twenty years, and more of a research and teaching focus on suprasegmentals (Derwing 2011), there is still no consensus in the field. Although there are those who expound the importance of focusing on suprasegmental elements of pronunciation (Diaz, 2017; Nakashima, 2006) there are others who are less convinced of its superiority (Levis, 2005). There is an established line of research, however, that seems to support the effectiveness of focusing on suprasegmental aspects of English when teaching pronunciation. Derwing et al. (1997), in an experiment involving 13 non-native speakers (NNS) and 12 weeks of instruction that focused more on suprasegmental features rather than segmentals, found positive results. Most of the participants

improved in at least one of the three areas they were judged on (accent, intelligibility, comprehensibility). Also, in testing three groups instructed differently, Derwing et al. (1998) found evidence supporting suprasegmental instruction. One group was instructed in segmentals, another in suprasegmentals, while the third received no pronunciation instruction. The group that received suprasegmental instruction was the only one to display improvement with unrehearsed speech. In another example, Hahn (2004) examined reactions to NNS primary stress when it was 1. Correct 2. Incorrect and 3. Absent. It was found that when listening to the correct sentence stress, evaluation was higher and that more content was retained. Overall, it was concluded, correctly placed stress positively affects intelligibility.

The above studies would indicate that there is strong empirical evidence for focusing pronunciation pedagogy more specifically on the suprasegmental aspects of language. Moreover, in attempting to instruct English learners from different linguistic backgrounds it would appear inefficient to deal with the segmental problems that are a feature of each individual student's unique language use, as these differ in accordance with each student's native language. Munro (2011) recognizes the necessity to prioritize when teaching pronunciation, noting the reality that pronunciation cannot receive "unlimited attention" (p. 9) in the classroom. As noted in the analysis of the student interviews, segmental areas that are problematic differ greatly between the students, and each would require individual attention in the best case teaching scenario. It is simply not efficient to isolate and deal with such problems in a multilingual setting. It should also be noted that each of the students who provided speech data for this project share commonality in that none of their first languages are stress-timed languages, as is English, and other languages such as German, Swedish, Russian, and Arabic. Stress timed languages are those languages where the stressed syllable occurs at regular intervals and unstressed syllables are made shorter to accommodate this rhythm. Stress-timed languages are not common in Asia. With the exception of Japanese, which is mora-timed, the other students' first languages are all syllable-timed. As such, the students, if transferring the rhythms of their first language, have a tendency to give equal time to each syllable. This is a feature of both mora-timed and syllable-timed languages and was apparent in the speech samples taken from the interviews. It is an area where all students, regardless of linguistic background, could benefit from explicit suprasegmental

classroom instruction with the aim of improving comprehension and communicative intelligibility.

Another argument for suprasegmental instruction is that due to the relative absence of such instruction in most ESL and EFL classrooms and the greater traditional focus on segmentals, it is more likely to be an area that has been neglected in the student's language learning experience. As Derwing notes in her study of one hundred ESL students, "the relatively low numbers of participants who nominated prosodic factors as the cause of communication problems may reflect a lack of awareness of prosodic issues, perhaps because these are rarely taught" (p. 559). Therefore, in my approach to giving pronunciation instruction in increasingly common multilingual EFL classrooms at Japanese universities like Kochi University, I have chosen to deal almost exclusively with suprasegmental features. This is an area of common need among learners, and explicit suprasegmental teaching focus allows the most efficient approach to address learner needs.

Pronunciation and Intelligibility

Since the concept of "comfortable intelligibility" was first raised by Kenworthy (1987) there has been much discussion regarding the aims of instruction in phonetics and phonology. While the ultimate goal may be seen to be native-like pronunciation, this is not considered realistic for most adult learners of English. Indeed, it has been suggested that there may be those who would prefer to retain their accent as a form of national pride, for example. Recent research, however, has focused more on the intelligibility of the speaker and for this there appears to be more consensus. Munro (2011) claims "Intelligibility is the single most important aspect of all communication. If there is no intelligibility, communication has failed" (p. 13). Therefore, the goal of instruction should not be seen as an attempt by the teacher to deny a student their identity by erasing an accent but an attempt to make the student more easily understood. The relationship between accent and intelligibility is worthy of note for our purposes. As noted by Derwing and Munro (2005) there may be social consequences that result from NNS accents. Derwing (2003), in interviews conducted with adult immigrants in Canada, found that one third of the interviewees said discrimination had resulted due to a NNS accent. Also, 95% of respondents said they would opt to speak like a native speaker if they had a choice. Yet in earlier

studies done by Munro and Derwing (1995) on 10 NNSs and 2 NSs, it was found that intelligibility did not necessarily diminish, even when scores for ‘accentedness’ also rated highly. Although this indicates that there is no relationship between having an accent and intelligibility, students in an EFL setting at university may strive for both maximum intelligibility and a reduction in their accent. This is a matter that should be negotiated with students. Some students may be content to maximize intelligibility while others may strive to achieve a more native-like pronunciation.

Teaching Principles

This outline of pronunciation teaching principles is based on a more general principle that language learning is best served by activities based on real communication. The communicative approach implies that language learning should involve using the language in meaningful interaction rather than analysing and isolating discrete items outside a social context. However, it is argued here that linguistic competence, specifically in the area of phonology, is a fundamental aspect of communicative competence and that targeted pronunciation features should always be linked to whatever aspect of the language we are teaching. This view is important to pronunciation teaching because the best solution to certain recurring problems of articulation seems to require a certain degree of “unnatural” teaching emphasis on an isolated phonological area. Just as a lack of vowel competence, for example, is one example of how communication could be impeded by distracting the listener’s attention from the message, so too can weakness in prominence and intonation put unwanted stress on both NS and NNS listeners. Such problem areas can be dealt with temporarily in isolation, provided that some effort is made “to relate linguistic form to social meaning” (Dalton and Seidlhofer, 1994, p. 133). With a priority on real communication, the use of authentic materials, and an emphasis on showing students how pronunciation works in context, language can become the topic, even in a communicative class. In other words, explicit suprasegmental teaching attention can be provided that maintains communicative intent in and about the language.

Teaching Suprasegmentals

In endeavouring to improve the suprasegmental skills of students, regardless of

linguistic background, the following section will outline practical activities that aim to promote awareness of suprasegmental features and stimulate communication amongst learners.

Developing an Awareness of Suprasegmental Features

At the very beginning of any instruction of suprasegmentals, it is essential to confirm the learner's awareness of these aspects of pronunciation. Interviews of adult ESL students by Derwing and Rossiter (2002) found that awareness of suprasegmental problems in speech was extremely limited, with most students more aware of pronunciation problems due to difficulty with segmentals. This lack of awareness about suprasegmental weaknesses was attributed to deficient instruction and the lack of a written system that represents features such as intonation and rhythm. It was assumed that an absence of knowledge of suprasegmentals by friends and room-mates, who commented on the student's pronunciation, may also have been a factor. Therefore, an explanation of all of the features of speech that are included within the definition of suprasegmentals is an appropriate way to begin. Explicit instruction with regards to defining stress, rhythm, pitch, tempo, and voice quality should be given at this point, and examples provided. It is then beneficial to facilitate a discussion about pronunciation amongst the members of the class. Kenworthy's (1987) questionnaire from *Teaching English Pronunciation* is a thought-provoking starting point, yet questions regarding suprasegmental features of pronunciation should be added such as 1. Are you conscious of suprasegmental aspects of language when you speak? 2. Have you studied suprasegmentals before? 3. Have you studied segmentals before? 4. Which do you think is most important? I have therefore made my own adaptation of Kenworthy's questionnaire to frame for students some of the areas of pronunciation that they may not be familiar with (see Appendix 2).

Analysing Suprasegmental Features of NNS Speech

The next activity is an adaptation of an activity taken from *Pronunciation* (Dalton & Seidlhofer) (p. 157). After handing out a print for the students to take notes with (see Appendix 3), a recording of a NNS with some suprasegmental issues reading a script (a passage from a novel or short newspaper article would be suitable)

is played. Students are required to make note of any suprasegmental aspects of the recorded speaker that could be changed to improve intelligibility. After playing most of the recording, students can then be placed into groups to discuss their findings. Questions to stimulate the discussion could be, 1). Is the speaker on the recording easy to understand? 2). If so, what makes the person easy to understand? If not, why? 3). What suprasegmental aspects should this person focus on? 4). If this person was a friend, would you comment on their pronunciation? The intention of the activity is to make students more acutely aware of suprasegmental features of their own speech by listening to another NNS. As a follow up exercise, students could do the same activity listening to a NNS with a good grasp of suprasegmental skills and comparing the two recordings. Alternatively, students could listen to both a NNS and a NS speaking more spontaneously in an interview and make comparisons of the suprasegmental features in the recordings.

Dialogue Transcription Activity

In line with wanting to maintain an emphasis on the use of authentic materials, the following activity seeks to have students find their own dialogue or monologue, whether that be from a well-known speech or movie scene, and to analyse its suprasegmental features. Students are directed to record and transcribe the dialogue taken from a source in which language is used for authentic purposes, and to focus specifically on one suprasegmental feature. For example, a student choosing Barack Obama's inauguration speech may wish to focus on the rhythm and how this contributes to his reputation as a skilled orator. The length of the dialogue or monologue should only be between one and two minutes long. Students are required to make a presentation to the class, highlighting the suprasegmental feature that is most prominent in the dialogue and explaining the effect this has on the audience. Consultation with the teacher may be necessary during the transcribing process and also in isolating distinctive suprasegmental features of speech. It is important to note, here, that authentic materials need not be NS materials. A speech by an internationally known NNS politician, a NNS broadcast, or any speech sample from a NNS speaker would be considered as 'authentic' both in terms of content and task.

Improving Suprasegmental Speaking Skills

Although the above activities, combined with explanations from the teacher, endeavour to bring about a heightened awareness of suprasegmental features, they may not in themselves serve to rectify areas that are problematic in the actual speech of the learner. However, through dictogloss activities, and shadowing of the passages used in dictogloss, students are provided with native speech models from which they can develop a greater degree of suprasegmental competency. Dictogloss is a slightly adapted version of dictation where students write down a passage as it is dictated by the teacher a number of times. The passage is then collaboratively reconstructed from the segments that each student has recorded. Of dictation, Underhill (1994) observes “learners begin to discover what it is about spoken English they tend *not* to hear” (p. 202). By this he is referring to suprasegmental features such as unstressed syllables or one syllable function words. When completely reconstructed, students will have an opportunity to practice oral production of the passage through a shadowing exercise, taking care of the stressed and unstressed words and syllables they discovered during the reconstruction. Yang (2016) also highly recommends adopting shadowing techniques in the classroom. He notes: “In reproducing the natural native sound patterns through shadowing or mimicking, learners inevitably reproduce these idea linkages in their own minds. This enhances both intelligibility and motivation for the target language, and learners exhibit enhanced confidence in discovering their ability to approximate native speech successfully” (p. 73). Yang advocates the use of TED talks as a model for shadowing. While this may be too difficult and therefore demotivating for lower level students, for intermediate and higher-level students it is a rich source from which they can focus on the suprasegmental aspects of English. It is also an authentic resource that has the added advantage of being available for use as a shadowing model outside the classroom.

Communicative Activities

As word stress issues featured prominently in the student interviews, communicative activities that focus on lexical stress are beneficial when teaching suprasegmentals. The syllable upon which stress falls on a word is often determined by particular suffixes. With many suffixes such as *-ive*, *-ient* and *-ial*, stress falls on the syllable before the suffix (Kenworthy, 1987). Therefore, activities that deal with

such suffixes provide an opportunity for students to familiarize themselves with the syllables that need to be pronounced strongly. Questionnaires that highlight a certain suffix can be an effective method of practicing stress. Tiittanen (2017) describes one such questionnaire where students focus on the suffix *-ic*. In a slight adaptation of Tiittanen's idea, students watch a short foreign drama such as *Friends*, and make their own questions regarding the personalities of the different characters using a prepared list of *-ic* adjectives such as energetic, pessimistic, athletic and eccentric. Examples may be "Who is the most energetic character?" or "Do you consider any of the characters to be romantic?". Although this only deals with one suffix, students should also be made aware of all of the other suffixes where the preceding syllable is stressed (see Appendix 4).

Activities that target intonation are also highly beneficial in raising students' suprasegmental skills. As intonation is important in conveying attitudes or emotions, dialogue and role-play are an efficient means of developing the learner's intonation patterns. Tiittanen (2017) provides an example of using dialogue and role-play in the classroom. Initially, the teacher can provide examples of intonation using a dialogue, varying patterns depending on the intended emotion. Anger or excitement may be pitched higher and faster while disinterest will be slower and flatter (see Appendix 5 for a sample dialogue). Students can attempt to guess the intended emotion. Students can then use the dialogue themselves in small groups or in front of the class. With higher level groups, providing the students with a scenario and having them create their own dialogues in a role-play type activity allows students to more freely communicate with each other and practice intonation under a teacher's guidance (see Appendix 6 for role-play scenarios).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have described the phonological features of four students from different linguistic backgrounds and recommended a focus on explicit suprasegmental instruction that helps meet the pronunciation needs of everyone. Due to overly divergent individual needs in segmental work, and the students' common background in being native speakers of syllable or mora-timed languages, suprasegmental communication activities can be seen to be the most practical, efficient, and beneficial classroom approach. I have highlighted activities that not

only serve to remedy the common intelligibility needs of students in a multilingual classroom environment, but also to isolate and stimulate awareness of suprasegmentals, with an emphasis on including activities that make use of authentic materials and lean towards a more communicative approach. This is not to de-emphasize or trivialize the segmental work required to improve pronunciation; instructional attention will be important here too. However, given the increasingly multilingual nature of Japanese EFL classrooms due to increased numbers of foreign exchange students, and given that learners are not likely to have had explicit suprasegmental instruction, learner needs may be best met by placing teaching emphasis in this domain. A suprasegmental focus can also add significant value to communicative intelligibility, a must in multilingual/multicultural classrooms, and in contexts where English is used as an international language.

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Appendix 1

Interview questions

- 1) How many years do most students study for in your country, beginning from elementary school?
- 2) What do you like about education in your country?
- 3) Is there anything you would like to change about education in your country?
- 4) Tell me about English education in your country.
- 5) Is there anything you would like to change about English education in your country?
- 6) How do you find education in Japan?
- 7) How does it compare to education in your country?

Appendix 2

Student Questionnaire

1. When do you think it is more important to have good pronunciation?
 - a) When you are speaking to a native speaker of English
 - b) When you are speaking to a non-native speaker of English
2. When is it most important to pronounce well?
 - a) Speaking on the telephone
 - b) Meeting someone for the first time
 - c) Talking informally to someone you know well
 - d) Doing business in English
 - e) Talking to strangers
 - f) None of the above
3. Are you conscious of suprasegmental aspects of language when you speak?
4. Have you studied suprasegmentals before?
5. Which do you think is the most important?
 - a) intonation
 - b) linking words
 - c) stress
 - d) rhythm
 - e) voice quality
6. Which would you like to study the most?
 - a) individual sounds (phonemes)

- b) stress
- c) intonation
- d) rhythm

(Adapted from Kenworthy 1987)

Appendix 3

Intonation	Pitch	Stress	Rhythm	Linking

Appendix 4

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| -ive (impressive) | -iate (deviate) |
| -ient (incipient) | -iary (pecuniary) |
| -iant (deviant) | -iable (negotiable) |
| -ial (substantial) | -ish (diminish) |
| -ion (invention) | -ify (identify) |
| -ic (geographic) | -ium (premium) |
| -ian (median) | -ior (superior) |
| -ious (infectious) | -io (radio) |
| -ical (economical) | -iar (familiar) |
| -ity (opportunity) | -ible (impossible) |

(Kenworthy 1987: 64)

Appendix 5

Dialogue

Friend 1: Have you seen the new Star Wars movie?

Friend 2: No, What's it like?

Friend 1: The computer graphics are like nothing I've ever seen before.

Friend 2: Really? I bet it's not as good as Matrix.

Friend 1: Actually, it's way better. Completely different.

Friend 2: I don't believe you. Nothing could be as good as Matrix.

Dialogue should be read using excited intonation for friend 1 (voice higher pitched and rapid), yet disinterested for friend 2 (slow and monotone). This can then be contrasted with friend 2 using intonation that shows interest in friend 1's conversation.

Appendix 6

Scenario 1

Student A:

You have just washed a new shirt for the first time that you bought two days ago. All of the color comes out of the shirt and ruins all of the other clothes you were washing. Take the shirt back and complain to the shop assistant.

Student B:

You are a shop assistant at a clothes shop. A customer comes in with a complaint about a shirt that ruined their washing.

Scenario 2

Student A

You have just successfully finished a major project at work and you call your friend to ask them out to celebrate. Your friend sounds depressed but you don't know why.

Student B

Your friend calls you sounding very excited and asks you out. Your cat has just died, however, so you're not in the mood for going out. You don't want to tell your friend the reason because it might make them sad too.

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