

Your English

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How many of you know someone who really wants to speak English but doesn't seem to have the confidence to do so? I am asking this because I am interested in what makes English a difficult language for Japanese students despite the fact they spend at least six years studying it at school. Today I would like to share my opinion on this topic with you.

I was lucky enough to have lived in England with my family for nine years. My friends at school were British, Indian, Sri Lankan, Chinese and Iranian, and it was truly a multi-national school. The common language at my school was, of course, English and because of this, I really struggled with it in the beginning.

I'd like to share an experience from my school days in London. This was a conversation I had when my Indian friend invited me over to his home for a party. My Indian friend said, "*Jo, I do my birthday party tomorrow, you want come? Come to my house at tree and bling some snacks wid you.*"

What my Indian friend was saying was that it was his birthday tomorrow and asked me if I wanted to come to the party, and he told me to come to his house at three o'clock. He didn't mean his house was a tree! In this conversation, grammar and pronunciation were not correct, but I was able to understand him. Why? Because the conversation was about having a great time at my friend's house, not about speaking correct English.

Now, I'm back in Japan. There are many variant pronunciations of Japanese. My father lives in Kobe so when I speak with him, I speak *Kansai-ben*, Kobe dialect, but when I speak with my mother, brother and sister, I speak Shizuoka dialect. Even in this tiny island-country, people speak in different ways!

So, why can we communicate without issues between different types of Japanese pronunciation but can't do the same thing in English? My opinion is that Japanese people lack confidence in doing something unless they do it in the correct way. In addition, Japanese people see English as a skill to master rather than a simple communication tool.

English is an international language and different types of English are used according to the background and circumstances of the speaker. There are in fact 56 different ways to speak English in the UK alone. A further 42 different types of pronunciation are used in the US and there are seven different ways of speaking English in Canada. None of

them is correct English and many native speakers use incorrect grammar. So the Japanese pursuit of correct English is pointless. If correct English isn't important, what is?

What is important is WHAT you want to say and HOW MUCH you want to communicate to your listeners using the English words you know. What is more important is enjoying the chance to communicate without thinking about correct English. How many people in this room have regretted not taking the chance to speak English because they were worried about making mistakes? I believe that Japanese people need to stop being obsessed with correct English and start becoming obsessed with communication.

I'd like to share my experience of using English in a multi-national environment to encourage my friends to speak up in their own English. There are many ways to speak English and all of them are different. Even if you make a little mistake, your English will be understood. Next time you speak English, don't be afraid. Try to enjoy the experience of using the English you already know without worrying about being correct.

There is a whole new world waiting out there to be discovered just by reaching out, forgetting your fears and using YOUR ENGLISH.

(632 words)