

Using *Listening Laboratory* to keep up with the “Englishes” in Japan

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Having taught in five different continents, what fascinates me most about students in Japan is their incredible potential and ability, often left undiscovered due to a lack of confidence. As a teacher of English language in Japan, I feel my job is to encourage students to believe in themselves, and to trust their abilities — even if they are shy about showing them!

Visible skills like listening and speaking are important because the inevitable comparison of one student to another can lead to a ranking system. Students in the lower ranks need even more encouragement. The *Listening Laboratory* series is set up with a wide variety of topics and situations so that more students can connect to what they are listening to. Familiar topics are especially helpful for students' comfort levels and motivation.

On a practical level, the English students learn in Japan may seem at times unnatural or “non-native”, but what we need to remember is that as the world globalises, English takes on many different forms. Students need to be reminded that there is not just one correct English, but rather a world of different “Englishes.” Exposing students to a variety of English uses and cultures is especially helpful for nurturing their awareness.

Using a textbook series like *Listening Laboratory* can help students to think more about the different uses of English. Topics cover countries throughout the world, and

the information pages offer advice on changes English makes depending on whether it is being used by a North American or a Briton.

In terms of the different uses of English, I find it very helpful for students to consider situational English. Recent linguistic theory suggests that language students need to learn more about various genres in order to be able to match their language to the appropriate interaction. *Listening Laboratory* provides examples from a wide range of situations that will help students to be more prepared when they face such interactions in real life.

Getting back to the great potential of Japanese students of English, I have found there is nothing more motivating for a classroom than a happy, lively atmosphere. The topics raised in *Listening Laboratory* include everything from every day conversations to thought-provoking statements, and from serious, important issues to humorous interactions. I usually encourage my students to discuss their understanding and interpretations of all the different interactions, and enjoy their growth and discovery with them!

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