

When I was at home this summer, I spent a weekend in Washington, DC with my best friend. The first thing she said to me was, “It’s so great to see you!” but that was quickly followed by, “You talk weird. What happened?” When I was here in Japan, I often didn’t notice, but when I went home it was more obvious to me, or pointed out by my friends, that my English has changed for the worse since I’ve been here.

The first thing that my friend noticed was that I say my vowels differently now. I think that’s probably a combination of speaking with Japanese people as well as English speakers from other countries. But either way, I’ve changed. Another thing that made my friends and family laugh is the way that I ask questions now. Intonation varies among different types of English spoken around the world, but in America, our intonation generally goes up at the end of a sentence. Now, my intonation often goes up in the middle of a sentence and down at the end when I’m asking a question, which I suppose is much more characteristic of British English. I think it was such a gradual change that I didn’t really notice on my own, but either from my interactions with teachers and students at school or my interactions with other ALTs, my pronunciation and intonation have changed enough in the past year to make my friends laugh really hard.

But that’s not the worst of it! The worst part is definitely “Japanese English.” There are many English phrases or sentence constructions that are used so commonly in Japan but that we would never say at home in America. The word *enjoy* is a prime example. It’s not wrong to say, “let’s enjoy working together”, so I would never correct a student or anyone else if they said that in Japan. But any combination with “let’s enjoy” would probably be laughed at. Instead of using the word *enjoy*, we would usually use the words *like* or *fun*. “I had fun today.” “I really like my job—it’s a lot of fun.” or “Did you have fun at the party?” are all much more common phrases. We don’t make sentences with *Let’s* in America as often as I see them in Japan, either. Again, it’s not wrong, but we use it very infrequently in daily life at home. If I wanted to study Japanese with my friends, I wouldn’t say “Let’s enjoy studying Japanese,” but rather, “Do you want to study Japanese together?” These have the same meaning, and they’re both grammatically correct, but one is more common in Japan, though a little bit awkward, and one is more natural in America.

There are also a lot of Japanese words that I, along with many other ALTs, have adopted into my English vocabulary. In Japan, I often say soft cream instead of soft serve, conbini instead of convenience store, nenkyu instead of vacation day and on and on. Most ALTs, even if they don’t speak or understand Japanese well, have a general knowledge of a lot of Japanese words like this and we use them a lot even

though we're speaking in English. This also made for some awkward conversations at home, when I accidentally slipped in a Japanese word that I'm used to using even with my English speaking friends here.

Even though I was only home for a few weeks, I think my speech readjusted quickly. Many Americans insert the word "like" into their speech where it is completely unnecessary, a little bit like some people in Japan who insert "sa's" into their speech. My mom thinks that this sounds uneducated and she always used to hate it when I said "like" like this. But she was happy to hear that I had totally dropped this habit in Japan. Needless to say, she was irritated that by the end of my visit I had started this awful habit again. It took a year for my English to change this much, but I was relieved to know that after a few weeks back I was almost back to my normal self. I just hope that I can remember these differences and try to stop my students from using this Japanese English this year!