

ARE YOU MISUNDERSTOOD WHEN YOU SPEAK ENGLISH? THEN DON'T WASTE TIME AND IMPROVE YOUR PRONUNCIATION

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Usually some of the new students, mainly freshmen, have difficulties pronouncing words in English. Sometimes they are ashamed to utter a word in English for fear of their own mistakes that they may commit in front of other students. Because of these reasons students may not be able to improve their pronunciation, or it may be difficult for them to do so. My main goal is to bring the issue of pronunciation to your attention in a broad sense as an important component of your speech. If you are not able to build proper pronunciation in your speech while communicating with other native or non-native speakers, people talking to you may misunderstand you or will have difficulties in getting what you are saying at all.

Why do these problems often occur, and why is pronunciation one of the challenging issues in linguistics per se?

Linguists often point out that such problems may occur because of the mother tongue pronunciation and rules that it follows. That is to say, mother tongue and foreign language learning use the same patterns in linguistics. Or in other words, putting it more scientifically, *the linguistic awareness* of at least one language (in most cases it is the mother tongue), in the students, leads to difficulties in building up their

pronunciation in a foreign language.

Another question is this: why are these problems observed in our country more often now, than, let's say, 10-15 years ago (this is based on my long term teaching experience)? I do not intend to talk about the causes; instead, I'll try to share my own experience that can help you improve your language.

In the ex-Soviet times, for many people English was just a *'passive'* language that wasn't used or practiced much in society or in organized institutions. During that time, my brother spoke 4 languages, including English, he was certainly proud of that. He *"absorbed"* English mainly through songs. Once, there was a big international exhibition in Baku where my brother worked as an interpreter. I was shocked to see him speaking English to the foreigners.

"You aren't supposed to speak English here," I said to him.

"Why not?" He wondered.

"Because your grammar is bad, and you make many mistakes," I replied.

"But they say my English is very good. And I am not an English teacher who has to speak perfectly," he added.

Only many years later I realized that his very good pronunciation made his English so *«attractive»* to foreigners. In spite of his rough (in my opinion) grammar mistakes, he sounded quiet sufficient.

Sometimes you can confuse *'past simple'* and *'present perfect'*, for example, *I DID* instead of *I HAVE DONE* or vice versa. This isn't a very big deal at all, as later on you can improve your grammar, for example, through writing. But if you don't sound clear, then the person talking to you gets nervous or irritated. It is obvious that if someone doesn't catch what you say, then he gets mixed up. Moreover, all your bright ideas, presentations or projects might not impress the audience. Probably some people even try to avoid your company, but you don't understand the reason. Have you ever had such a negative experience either inside or outside the classroom? A study at the University of Leicester says that "English is now a lingua franca-with more non-native speakers in the world than native speakers." The

whole world speaks English now. Don't forget that the majority of people speak with the characteristic charm of their original language. For example, you can easily identify Italians speaking English, as you catch the 'musical shade' of their original language.

But incomprehensible speech and characteristic notes of the original language are very different notions.

So what can you do to improve your pronunciation and articulation? Here are some tips that can certainly help you make your language more adequate:

- Practice as much as possible during your English classes and outside the classroom because "Practice makes perfect";

- Read your English books (newspapers, internet materials) aloud as if you were a TV announcer;

- Listen to different dialogues, texts, etc., and try to repeat or imitate them

- Watch movies (or TV programs) in English;

- Listen to English songs and sing;

- Recite English verses (poems).

Now, are you ready to take this challenge and enjoy your good English?

Don't waste time: Try and try again to be intelligible and bright.

I also recommend a deep investigation of the interrelationship between the syntax, morphology and phonetics of students' native languages and foreign languages for future study.

Good luck with your English language learning!

Note

Lingua franca is a language systematically used to make communication possible between people not sharing their mother tongue, like a common language.