

Play Acting for Better Pronunciation

Hi, I'm AJ Hoge, the author of Effortless English, Learn to Speak English like a Native. This is the Effortless English show. For a free copy of my audio book enter your email at EffortlessEnglish.com. That's EffortlessEnglish.com.

Pronunciation. It's very important. Your English pronunciation is important for several reasons. Number one, obviously, you need good pronunciation to be understood, right. If your pronunciation is terrible, other people will not understand you when you speak. So, even if you know a lot of words, a lot of vocabulary, even if your grammar is perfect, even if your listening is great, even if you are very fluent and speak quickly, if your pronunciation is bad, people will not understand you, so, if your pronunciation is bad, you waste all of your English skills. You waste your vocabulary, you waste your grammar, you waste your fluency. It's very, very important. In fact, pronunciation is more important than grammar for being understood.

Think about it, if you use bad grammar when speaking, usually people will still understand you. For example, you can say, "Yesterday, I eat a lot." That's wrong grammar, the verb is wrong, but everybody will understand your idea, what you are trying to say. You will be understood, but, if you say, yeessereeeaeaaalaaww," (laughter) terrible pronunciation, no one will understand you, even if you say correctly, "yesterday, I ate a lot," but if you have a really terrible accent, "yessseray I eee a law" then no one will understand your grammar is useless in this case. So, pronunciation, very, very important for verbal communication, spoken communication.

There's also a psychological part, a psychological importance for pronunciation. See, people will respect you more, automatically, unconsciously, when your pronunciation is clear. Is this fair? No, it's not fair, I know. If your pronunciation is bad, people just, they don't respect you as much. They, they sometimes will see you more like a child, you know, they they will react to you more like a child with less respect. I know it's not fair, but this is reality, this is the real world. On the other hand, when you have very good pronunciation with your English, when people listen to you, when you talk to other people, especially native speakers, Americans, Canadians, British, Australian, when your pronunciation is very good, just automatically, they respect you more, and they also accept you more quickly and more easily. Again, this is simply the truth. Fair or not fair, this is reality and so pronunciation is also very important for these reasons.

Now, in some kinds of communication and in some areas of life, pronunciation becomes even more important. I'll give you an example, call centers. A call center it's like phone customer service, right, and a lot of companies now are using call centers in other countries. So, for example, a lot of American companies, US companies, use call centers. They use people in other countries such as India, the Philippines, and other countries to do their customer service on the phone. Just recently I had this happen. I had a problem with a rental car, and I called the customer service of the company and the person who answered had a very strong Indian accent.

Now, I understood her accent, so, for me it was no problem, but, I think for many Americans it would have been a problem. In other words, many Americans would have trouble understanding a strong Indian accent. For this reason, many American customers might get more easily frustrated, more easily angry because they can't understand the call center employee because of pronunciation. So, for a call center employee, pronunciation is very, very, very important. This woman was fluent in English, but her

accent was strongly Indian. If she was dealing with Indian customers, that's no problem, but she was dealing with American customers. She really, to be a great employee, to do a great job, probably to make more money and get promotions, she really needs to improve her American accent, her American pronunciation. If you're working in any kind of business, you really need to work on your pronunciation. It becomes very, very, very important. Again, for that reason of respect and acceptance and being clearly understood.

Now, another situation where pronunciation is super important, you probably know, is phone calls. Phone calls are more difficult, even for you listening to someone on the phone, having a phone conversation is more difficult, usually, than face to face, right. Face to face, you can see their mouth, so it's easier to understand them, face to face, you can see their body movements, their gestures, all of this makes their English much easier to understand. For you, face to face or video is usually more easy, it's easier. Well, guess what, this is also true for the other person when they listen to you, especially if your pronunciation is not good. It's more difficult for them to understand you on the phone. They can't see your mouth. They can't see your movements, your gestures. Sometimes the connection on the phone is not so clear, so it's a little difficult to hear clearly. For all of these reasons, pronunciation becomes super important for phone conversations, and many people have to do phone conversations for their work, for their business in English.

OK, we accept, we know pronunciation is very important for all of these reasons and others. So, let me give you a tip today, an easy, easy, easy tip. In fact, a very fun tip, a fun suggestion, a fun technique for improving your English pronunciation. It's called Pronunciation Play Acting. Pronunciation Play Acting. Now, that first word, "Play" is very important. You must do this technique with a spirit, with the feeling of playfulness, playful, so it's fun, it's light, not serious, not heavy, no, no, no, playful, fun. You do this technique with the spirit, with the feeling of playful exaggeration. Exaggeration means doing something too much, more than necessary, more than usual, so, playful exaggeration.

It's very, very simple. All you do is imitate, copy me, or your favorite English speaking actor or actress. That's all you're going to do, you're just going to copy them. You can use this podcast, this one right now, that I, this audio, you can just play it again and again, and you can pause after each sentence, you can pause every two minutes, it depends on your memory, but up to you, but just pause sometimes, and then imitate, copy my speaking. Some of you know that technique of shadowing or tracking, that's also a good technique, but, in this technique, you're doing something a little different. You're going to exaggerate. So, imagine you are a comedian, right. You know how comedians sometimes ... Sometimes a comedian will imitate a famous person, right, they pretend to be a famous actor, for example, or a politician, like a president or a prime minister or something. And, when they do it, when the comedian does it, they always exaggerate the person's speaking, and they exaggerate their accent, and they exaggerate their movements and their facial expressions also.

You're going to do the same, so imagine you're a comedian. Let's say you are copying me, you are going to copy me, you're going to copy me, you're going to imitate me with playacting. You would play one or more sentences from me, then you would, out loud, you would say the same sentences and you would exaggerate my accent. You would exaggerate my emotions, you would exaggerate my way of speaking. Do it stronger than I do, and try to be funny, it's okay, you can kind of do it in a joking way. So, if someone heard you, they would know, "oh, that's AJ." If someone knows me, and they heard you copying me, they would say, "ah ha ha," they would laugh, and say, "oh, that's AJ, that's so funny," right, because it's so much, it's too much, it's so exaggerated.

I'll give you a very easy example for this, Arnold Schwarzenegger. Lots of comedians, they love to imitate with playacting, they love to imitate Arnold Schwarzenegger. He has a very unique accent, right? A very clear, special way of speaking. But, when comedians, when people imitate Arnold Schwarzenegger, they always exaggerate a lot. If you listen to him speak, especially now, if you listen to him give a speech, it's actually, yes, he has his accent, of course, but it's not as strong as the comedians. The comedians always do it much too much, "Hello, I am Arnold Schwarzenegger. I will pump you up. I am the governor of California." Right, they, hey imitate him super strong. He actually doesn't sound like that, right, it's actually much softer, but, when they playact, when the comedians playact, they always make his accent super, super, super, super, super strong.

Another famous example is Clint Eastwood. A lot of comedians, they love to copy Clint Eastwood, and again, they always exaggerate his accent a lot. It's actually much stronger than his real accent. So, they always say, "Go ahead punk, make my day," right, he's got that kind of low, he almost growls like a dog, "Make my day," right. If you listen to an interview with Clint Eastwood, he does not sound that strong, right.

It's ... Again, they are exaggerating. But, this is a powerful technique for improving your pronunciation. See, you have your accent now, you ... If you're Italian, you have an Italian accent. If you're Japanese, you're speaking English with a Japanese accent probably. To improve your accent, to improve your pronunciation, you need to exaggerate your American accent, you need to exaggerate your practice. You need to do it too strong, this is good practice. Your ears, right now, they can't hear the American accent completely. You're not hearing all of the small little sounds, so, by exaggerating when you practice, you will actually get much closer to the real, natural accent of a native speaker.

Now, of course, I'm North American, I'm from the United States, so if you want an American accent, then, of course, playact with an audio from an American. You can use me, you can use anybody, any native speaker from the United States or Canada. If you want a British accent, then no problem, just do playacting with a British actor. You want an Australian accent, again, find an Australian. Find an audio from them and again, exaggerate, exaggerate, exaggerate. Do this every day. This should be fun, this should not feel like work. I know that some English learning, "Oh, you need discipline," and "Oh, it feels like a lot of work, it's tough," this should not feel like that. This should feel like you're just being really silly and fun, like you're just being kind of stupid and silly, and really, really, really exaggerated. You can even look in the mirror and try to do the facial expressions, too, and again, exaggerate them. Think like a comedian, pretend like you're a comedian. Do it every day and do it again with the spirit of very playful exaggeration.

Time for a Twitter question. Our Twitter question comes from Ahmed [Sitar 00:16:02]727. Now, you can follow me on Twitter @AJHoge. Just my name, @AJHoge, @AJHoge. Send me a question, send me a comment. OK, the Twitter question for today is a very common question. I get this question all the time, "Which course should I start first? Your original course or your Power English course?" So, these are the two starter courses that I have at EffortlessEnglishClub.com. My courses are at EffortlessEnglishClub.com. What's the difference between the original course and the Power English course? The original course is easier. The original course is for low-intermediate level learners, speakers. Speakers, now, if your reading is good, it doesn't matter, it's your speaking and listening. I train you in speaking and listening. So, if you feel like, "my listening and speaking are not so good, they're a little bit low," get my original course first. Do that course first. On the other hand, if you're more of a normal-

intermediate level, if you understand all of this podcast quite easily for example, then you should start with my Power English course. That's more of a middle-intermediate level. Power English and the original course, they're both sold at EffortlessEnglishClub.com. Thank you, Ahmed Sitar for your question.

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