



Kev's English Podcast: Episode 6: How to improve your pronunciation

I have spoken before about how to improve your spoken English in general, but this episode is addressing the subject of pronunciation in particular. I outline a method you can use and some steps you can take.

My links..

If you want lessons, click here <https://www.italki.com/en/teacher/1078268>

If you want to see my videos, click here <https://www.youtube.com/@TheEnglishNative>

Hello and welcome to Kev's English Podcast. Real English every week. Hello, hello, hello.

It's Kevin here. Time for another episode of Kev's English Podcast. The podcast made by Kev in English, so what else do you think I should call it? Anyway, now, as I mentioned in one of my previous episodes, sometimes it's not so easy to think of topics to speak about, so what I'm doing now, I'm taking questions from my learners on Italki and in my group on Telegram, etc., and from my students in general, and if I've got a particular question, they can ask me, and if it's an interesting one, I can make a podcast about it.

So, today I got up, someone was asking about pronunciation, how they can improve it, so I thought, ah, that's an interesting topic, let's talk about that one. Now, first thing I want to say is that we don't want to confuse pronunciation with accent. Now, they are connected, of course, but accent is accent.

I mean, if I were to speak or say something in Chinese or Turkish, say, or in Slovak, I might pronounce it correctly, but you would immediately notice that I was an Englishman. Pronunciation and accent. So, accent, you can change it.

Usually, accent changes, though, after quite some years of living in another country. So, for example, I was talking to a Slovak girl once, and she'd spent quite a few years living in Austria, so she had a, so her accent had changed, and I could definitely hear elements of German in her speaking. And the same way that if you, like, I sometimes get Chinese students, and they've either spent some time living in America, or their tutors in China were American, and so they have a

definite American twang to their accent, you know.

But changing accents is not an easy matter. It can be done if you think of how, sorry, of how actors prepare for a role. For example, now, what they would do, say, like, it's an English actor, and he wants to sound like a Russian or a German, whatever.

What they do, they get a speech coach, a native speaker of whatever that language is, and they spend hours and hours in the company, or presence of, that person. They take the most obvious features and exaggerate them, accentuate them, so, you know, they have a voice coach to work with. Well, most ordinary people can't really do that.

We don't have a time, and we certainly can't afford it. But there's some things that you can do to improve your pronunciation, and possibly accent, if you really want to change it. So, I'm not going to say much more about accent, because it is possible to, you know, to have a British accent, or an American accent.

Some professionals wish to do this, like, in law or business. They think that having an American accent, or an English accent, gives them more prestige and status. But for most people, that's not really a factor.

So, for pronunciation, which is about intelligibility. So, that covers things like phonemics, for different sounds, your consonants, your vowels, intonation, rising tone, falling tone, rhythm. Every language has that rhythm, do-do-do-do-do, you know.

Stress on vowels or sounds within words, and stress on words within a sentence. So, all these things are part of your pronunciation. So, a couple of tips.

Now, the main thing is, you have to make recordings of yourself speaking. Now, it's often a fact that, if you've never recorded your voice and heard yourself, you know, and heard how you sound to other people, it might come as a bit of a shock. When I first started making videos and podcasts some years ago, I thought it was terrible.

I thought, really? Is that how I sound? It sounds really bad. But, that's what you've got to do. You need to make recordings.

Now, the second thing, connected, you need a target. So, what I recommend is, you find a target, a pronunciation, or accent. It could be one of your favourite actors, or some podcast, BBC stuff, you know, or whatever.

And, what you do is, you play, I mean, you know, you can download it as an mp3 at first, and you play a line or a couple of sentences. And then, you try and immediately repeat and copy, and record yourself while you do so. Now, there's many different apps.

You can use your phone, of course. There's one I recommend called Audacity, A-U-D-A-C-I-T-Y, which is a free, open source bit of software that allows you to import mp3s as target sounds. And, you can record on the same thing.

So, you can have your target sound and your recording underneath it for comparison's sake. So, you need to get yourself a target, play a line or two, repeat yourself, and copy it, and try and match that rhythm, intonation, etc. Now, the best thing, however, and I know not everybody can do this or can afford it, you need to speak to natives.

Now, if you don't live anywhere where natives are to be found, you can use sites and apps such as italki, which is where I'm speaking from now. So, obviously, with italki, you can connect to natives, and they will, you know, if they're professional teachers, they will correct you, advise you, and they will do some exercises, minimal pairs, tongue twister things like, you know, a Peter, was it Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers, or whatever. All these kind of things.

So, if you work with a native speaker teacher, they can guide you through all these different exercises. And I say, like, minimal pairs, ship, sheep, bat, boat, you know, eat, ate, etc. And they can help you, and you can watch how they use their lips, mouth, teeth, and tongue to shape of a sound.

Because don't forget, one of the things that you will have to do is to relearn how to use your lips, mouth, teeth, and tongue to make particular sounds. So, your native is good. What you can also do by yourself, you can learn the pronunciation symbols, phonemics.

These are the strange characters that you see. If you have a dictionary, you often see the phonemic pronunciation above it. Now, there's lots of websites.

A very good app, however, is the Sounds Right app by the British Council. I'll put a link to that, and you can take a look at it. So, in summary then, you need to find a target.

Is it an actor? Is it American, English, or whatever? And make recordings. Compare your recording with the original sound. It's best if you do this in conjunction with a native speaker.

Maybe one on italki. Get as much practise speaking to a native. Watch how they make the sounds.

Do the exercises. Peter, what's it? Peter, Peter, Pecker, pickled peppers, blah, blah, blah. All those kind of things, which also are not so easy for natives either.

But, do some exercises. Learn the pronunciation symbols, phonemics. If you want to try that British Council app, I recommend it.

And see how it works out, okay? So, that's what I would recommend. So, if you think about it as kind of like, as I said, an actor preparing for a role. You need to spend, and it does take time.

Pronunciation is not something, I mean, you can learn the grammar rules, okay? You can develop your vocabulary, but pronunciation, that does take a fair bit of time and practise. Speaking, speaking, speaking. Recording, speaking.

And listening back. Anyway, so, I hope that helps. I'll see you next time.