

## An article

# Why study correct pronunciation?

- Prakash Almeida, Director, EnglishFountain

"Whenever I spoke to a person in London, they kept asking me "What? What?". I would repeat my sentence again and again. Finally they would say "Ah-ha!" and then say my sentence, using exactly my words! It was very humiliating. I knew my words and grammar were good, but nobody would understand me, just because of my pronunciation. I am very motivated to learn English now." - **A personal experience of a well known software professional from Mumbai working in London.**

The answer is very simple. It is: Because it is important to speak correct English pronunciation. You must respect the dignity of the English language. There is something called 'linguistic hygiene' that you must maintain.

You understand that your language is mirror to your personality. What you are will be known to the world through your words. There is no pint in telling you how important it is to learn good English.

If there is 'Good English' and 'Better English' then is there something called 'Bad English?'  
Yes there is. Because when you speak English it must be *accurate* English.

English is a strange language, indeed a funny language full of pit falls. You can never take the English language for granted. You must know correct English if you want to use it effectively. To say that a person knows a language is to have the ability to speak it. Anyway, language was first spoken and then it was written.

Basically any language is a sound system. It is mainly composed of sounds with each sound assigned a permanent meaning of its own.

*That is why it is only logical that when every sound has its own distinct meaning and position you must take great care in producing the right and correct sound of it. Then in English there is something called 'Homophones'. These homophones are words with the same sound though these words have different spellings and different meanings.*

Isn't it funny? But that is how English is. You can think of many such words.

It is easy to get confused and confuse others. In short you have to take your sounding system in English very seriously.

English is not a phonetic language. This means that the sounds of the words do not correspond to the spellings. If you speak for results you must take care of your pronunciations. Now read the following two definitions given in two great dictionaries. Let's understand them correctly.

**pronunciation** n. 1 pronouncing of a word, esp. with reference to a standard. 2 act of pronouncing. 3 way of pronouncing words etc. [Latin: related to \*pronounce] (Oxford Dictionary)

There are two different pronunciations of this word (Cambridge Learner's Dictionary)

Note that the first impression you make when you speak English (even first two sentences) is through your pronunciations. It is one of the biggest things of your English. It is your pronunciation that tells the world how good is your English.

When you meet a person, and you just say a sentence or two, do you think they will notice your poor vocabulary or bad grammar? Definitely not! Your listeners **will** notice if your pronunciation is good or bad. If your pronunciation is poor, they will immediately take your English as "bad English". Your pronunciation creates the first impression you make.

When you learn good English the first thing you must learn is correct pronunciation. You can do without advanced vocabulary – you can use simple words to say what you want to say. You can live without advanced grammar – you can use simple grammar structures instead. But there is no such thing as "simple pronunciation". There is no substitute to correct pronunciation.

And the results of bad pronunciation are tragic. Even if you use great vocabulary and grammar, **people may simply not understand what you want to say.**

You should know how to say English sounds like the *ee*, *'* in *bid*, in *sleep* or the *o* in *ghost*, before you even learn words like *sleep* and *ghost*.

If you say "I don't need to study pronunciation. I just want to communicate in English." Many of them think that they can communicate in English because they can communicate with their teacher and other students.

Make no mistake. You live in the era of globalisation. You need to speak English which is internationally acceptable. You will have to speak with foreigners and your English (the sounds of your words) must be understandable to them all.

Unfortunately, many learners ignore pronunciation. They can communicate in class, so they think that they are good enough. After a few years they go to England or the USA and... nobody understands what they are saying

### **Communication is not enough**

If you can communicate in English with people from other countries, congratulations! It's a big achievement. But it may not be enough. **If you have a pleasant accent, people will simply enjoy talking to you.** They will want to spend time with you. On the other hand, if your accent is bad, people may be even avoiding you (consciously or unconsciously).

Notice that good pronunciation is not "perfect American or British accent". You don't have to sound like the Queen of England or the President of the United States of America.

Why not? Because there are many regional kinds of English. In England, people from Newcastle speak English differently from people in London. In America, people from New York City, California, and Texas each have their own pronunciation. So it is no problem if you have your own accent.

But your accent must be close to the standards (American and British English). What does it mean? Turn on your TV and watch channels like CNN International, NBC, , BBC, and others. You will hear many different people (news anchors, reporters, etc.) from Germany, France, and other non-English-speaking countries. They all have good accents – easy to understand and pleasant.

The rule is: If you are close to the standard, you can always communicate, and your English will be pleasant. If you are far from the standard, sometimes you won't communicate successfully.

**Pronunciation** is definitely the **biggest thing that people notice when you are speaking English.** It is your pronunciation that tells the world how good is your English. When you meet a person, and you just say a sentence or two, do you think they will notice your poor vocabulary or bad grammar? Probably not. But they **will** notice if your pronunciation is good or bad. If your pronunciation is poor, they will immediately think about you as "the guy/girl who speaks bad English". Your pronunciation creates the first impression you make.

Good pronunciation should be one of the first things that you learn in English. You can live without advanced vocabulary – you can use simple words to say what you want to say. You can live without advanced grammar – you can use simple grammar structures instead. But there is no such thing as "simple pronunciation". If you don't have good pronunciation, you have... bad pronunciation.

Sadly, learning good pronunciation is always ignored in the study of the English language. You must understand that good pronunciation has to be 'correct' pronunciation. One has to learn correct pronunciation with a dedicated effort. Even the natives of England are not an exception.

And the results of bad pronunciation are tragic. Even if you use great vocabulary and grammar, **people may simply not understand what you want to say.** To master correct you need to know the phonemic chart and other aspects of it. It is one time study. If you study systematically every day for some days, it is quite easy to master correct pronunciation of English.

If you do this, you will surely find that your words make people listen attentively.