



English Learning for Curious Minds



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BONUS Episode #004
The Truth About Pronunciation In English
March 27, 2030



[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to talk about pronunciation in English.

[00:00:17] It's a topic that comes up a lot, and today we are going to **bust¹** a lot of common **myths²**, talk about why pronunciation matters and about some of the things that you can do to improve your pronunciation.

[00:00:31] Before we get right into the podcast, I just wanted to say that their world is obviously in a pretty weird, scary place right now.

[00:00:40] You don't need another person telling you what to do so.

¹ break, prove wrong

² a commonly believed but false idea



The Truth About Pronunciation In English

[00:00:44] I'm not going to try to do so.

[00:00:46] All I'll say is to thank you for continuing to listen to the podcast and I hope that you are keeping well.

[00:00:53] And as this is a members-only podcast, I just want to thank you for your ongoing membership to Leonardo English.

[00:01:01] You make all of this possible, and each one of you is the reason that I keep on doing this show.

[00:01:08] Okay then, that's our thank yous over with for today.

[00:01:12] Let's talk about pronunciation.

[00:01:15] Firstly, let's just [clear up](#)³ one thing that lots of people get wrong, and that's the difference between pronunciation and accent.

[00:01:27] Before I explain this, just have a little think.

[00:01:31] Do you know what the difference is between pronunciation and accent?

[00:01:36] An accent is just a [distinctive](#)⁴ way of pronouncing words in a language.

[00:01:44] It's normally associated with a particular country, area or social class.

³ clarify

⁴ something that is distinctive is easy to recognise because it is different from other things



The Truth About Pronunciation In English

[00:01:51] Pronunciation, on the other hand, is similar to accent, but actually refers to the way in which certain individual sounds are produced.

[00:02:02] When we talk about non-native English speakers and pronunciation, there's normally a right or a series of right ways to pronounce a word, and there are also wrong ways to pronounce a word.

[00:02:17] But with an accent, there are hundreds, thousands of different accents in English, and none of them are any more right than any other.

[00:02:29] Just to give you an example of the difference between accent and pronunciation, we can take the classic example of tomato, tomato, right?

[00:02:40] People from different countries pronounce this word in different ways and they're both fine.

[00:02:46] I would say tomato, someone from America would probably say tomato.

[00:02:51] But pronouncing it for example, 'tomatoohh' is incorrect.

[00:02:56] That's bad pronunciation.

[00:02:58] The **stress**⁵ is in the wrong place.

[00:03:01] In English, you can have a English accent, you can have an American, you can have a French accent, a Spanish accent, or an accent from anywhere in the world.

⁵ the way that a word or syllable is pronounced with greater force than other words in the same sentence or other syllables in the same word



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[00:03:12] It doesn't mean that your pronunciation is bad, [necessarily](#)⁶.

[00:03:16] It's perfectly possible to have a French accent, but to have almost perfect pronunciation in English.

[00:03:25] Today we are talking about pronunciation, not specifically about accents.

[00:03:31] So pronunciation is how you make different sounds.

[00:03:35] It's about how the different sounds in a word are created.

[00:03:40] The reason I explained the difference between accent and pronunciation is because lots of English learners get them confused, and this is actually a bit of a problem for two reasons.

[00:03:54] Firstly, on one hand, people think that having a French accent, a Spanish accent, whatever accent it might be, they think that is bad because it means you have bad pronunciation, but it doesn't at all.

[00:04:11] Having a foreign accent is completely acceptable.

[00:04:15] It's part of your identity.

[00:04:17] It shows who you are.

[00:04:19] And speaking in English shouldn't be about hiding your [true self](#)⁷.

⁶ used in negatives to mean "in every case" or "therefore"

⁷ the real you



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[00:04:23] It shouldn't be about having a completely flat accent.

[00:04:28] But on the other hand, there are some people who think that the fact that they are a non-native speaker is an excuse or a reason rather to not try to improve their pronunciation.

[00:04:43] They confuse accent with pronunciation, and the result is that they continue to pronounce words incorrectly either because they just don't know that they're pronouncing them incorrectly or because they think it's not a problem and that it's just part of their identity.

[00:05:02] This, unfortunately, is a problem.

[00:05:06] The reality is that anyone from any mother tongue can make any sound pattern they want.

[00:05:13] If you don't have any kind of [speech defect](#)⁸ or actually, even if you do, with enough practice and enough work, you can pronounce any sound you want to.

[00:05:27] A child that's brought up in a Mandarin speaking household will speak with perfect pronunciation in Mandarin, and that exact child would speak with perfect Portuguese pronunciation if they were brought up in a Portuguese speaking household.

⁸ a difficulty in speaking clearly



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[00:05:43] We know that there's no biological reason, no physical reason, that we can't make certain sounds.

[00:05:50] But lots of people [give up](#)⁹, or at least don't make the effort that they should when it comes to pronunciation in English.

[00:06:01] And here's why this is a problem.

[00:06:04] Firstly, there have been multiple studies that have shown that the better your pronunciation, the more you'll be respected when you are speaking in English.

[00:06:15] There is [subconscious](#)¹⁰ [bias](#)¹¹ from the point of view of the listener, so that people with worse pronunciation aren't respected and trusted by native speakers.

[00:06:29] At least they're not respected and trusted as much as native speakers are.

[00:06:35] Essentially, the more the person speaking sounds like the person who is listening, the more likely the listener is to trust the words of the speaker.

[00:06:46] And this isn't just my opinion.

[00:06:49] There've been quite a few studies that have shown that this is the case.

⁹ to stop trying

¹⁰ the part of your mind that notices and remembers information when you are not actively trying to do so, and influences your behaviour even though you do not realise it

¹¹ the action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing in an unfair way, because of allowing personal opinions to influence your judgment



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[00:06:55] There was a really interesting experiment on this relatively recently.

[00:07:00] Researchers from the University of Chicago wanted to see whether people with stronger accents and worst pronunciation were considered more or less [trustworthy](#)¹² than native speakers.

[00:07:14] So first, the researchers asked a group of 35 people to judge the [truthfulness](#)¹³ of simple statements, things like "ants don't sleep", and "a giraffe can go without water longer than a camel can".

[00:07:34] And these statements were read by people with various strong accents and bad pronunciation, people whose mother tongue was Turkish, Korean, Polish, Austrian-German and Italian, as well as some native English speakers.

[00:07:55] So these statements, they were the kinds of things where you think, "well, could be true, I'm not really so sure".

[00:08:01] Maybe ants don't sleep.

[00:08:03] Maybe a giraffe can go longer without water than a camel can.

[00:08:08] The people listening were told that the speakers were just speaking already provided statements and it wasn't their opinion.

¹² able to be trusted

¹³ the quality of being honest and not containing or telling any lies



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[00:08:18] What the researchers found was that the statements of the native speakers were trusted much more than the statements of those with the heavy accents and poor pronunciation, despite them saying exactly the same things.

[00:08:34] So it makes a difference from the point of view of trust and of believability, but also from the point of view of commanding respect.

[00:08:44] And making it easier for the person listening to you to understand what you're saying - pronouncing words in a correct way without a strong accent means that you are requiring the other person to do less work.

[00:09:01] If someone is hard to understand, the other person often [switches off¹⁴](#), they lose concentration.

[00:09:09] I imagine that you have experienced this with foreigners speaking your mother tongue.

[00:09:16] It's quite easy to [switch off](#), right?

[00:09:18] Speaking clearly and making it easy for the other person to understand just means that the conversation will be a lot more [fluid¹⁵](#) and you'll avoid hearing the [dreaded¹⁶](#) "excuse me, can you repeat that?"

¹⁴ stop paying attention

¹⁵ smooth and continuous

¹⁶ used to refer to something that you do not like or want



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[00:09:34] So even though you might think that pronunciation doesn't make a huge difference, it really does.

[00:09:42] Maybe you already knew this and in that case, good for you.

[00:09:47] And if you didn't know that well, then we will shortly be talking about some tips on how you can improve your pronunciation.

[00:09:55] Let's talk now about why some people [struggle¹⁷](#) with pronunciation.

[00:10:00] Then after that, we'll go over a few tips of things that you can do to improve your pronunciation.

[00:10:08] Firstly, pronunciation is formed of two parts.

[00:10:13] Number one is being able to actually hear and recognise sounds.

[00:10:18] If I say beach and bitch, can you hear the difference between those two words?

[00:10:25] I'll just say that again, beach and bitch.

[00:10:30] To a native English speaker it's easy to recognise the difference between the two, but for some people it's really hard, especially people whose native language is something like Spanish or Italian.

¹⁷ to experience difficulty and make a very great effort in order to do something



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[00:10:46] I use the example of beach and bitch because it is something that lots of my Italian friends always get wrong, and they also find it quite funny.

[00:10:56] Being able to recognise the difference between two different sounds is the first part.

[00:11:02] You should focus on this before focussing on actually reproducing the different sounds.

[00:11:08] If you can't recognise the difference between two things, firstly, there's no way that you will be able to [reproduce¹⁸](#) those sounds yourself.

[00:11:18] And secondly, it will be harder to understand others when you hear them being spoken.

[00:11:25] A really good thing to do here is to focus on what's called minimal pairs.

[00:11:31] So that's things like our classic example of bitch versus beach, disk or desk, fan or van and so on.

[00:11:40] Find the ones that you have trouble recognising and practice, practice, practice until you can not only recognise the difference, but that you can reproduce the sounds yourself.

[00:11:56] So we have moved onto the topic of actually making the sound.

¹⁸ to make again



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[00:12:01] As I said, you should only focus on this when you are confident that you can understand the difference between the sounds.

[00:12:09] Now, I'm not going to talk about particular sounds in English here as depending on what your mother tongue is, some sounds will be harder for you to make than others.

[00:12:21] So I'll just talk about a few resources and techniques that are pretty helpful.

[00:12:27] Some of these you may be aware of, some of them, well, you might not be.

[00:12:35] Firstly, and this might sound really obvious, but Google Translate can actually be an excellent resource for quickly telling you if you are pronouncing a word correctly and showing you how to physically pronounce it.

[00:12:50] There's a function within Google Translate that allows you to hear how the word is spoken.

[00:12:56] You probably know about that, it's the little button that looks like a speaker .

[00:13:01] But that's pretty basic.

[00:13:03] So I'm going to [let you into](#)¹⁹ a trick that I imagine you may not have been aware of.

¹⁹ to tell you something (normally secret)



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[00:13:08] If you Google "how to pronounce", and then you add the word, so if you Google "how to pronounce elephant", you find some pretty cool functionality.

[00:13:21] You can try this now.

[00:13:23] So firstly, you can see the individual [component](#)²⁰ parts of the word.

[00:13:29] In the example of elephant, it would be eh· luh· fnt.

[00:13:34] This is pretty cool.

[00:13:35] It shows you where the [stress](#) is, so you know that it's not "eh leh fant".

[00:13:42] You can of course, also press a button to hear how it's pronounced in English, both in British and American English.

[00:13:51] Then it starts getting really cool so you can see a little video of where your [lips](#)²¹ should be, when you say each [component](#) part of the word.

[00:14:02] And where it gets even cooler is that Google will also allow you to check your pronunciation.

[00:14:10] You can record yourself saying a particular word and Google will tell you how well you did, it'll tell you where you went wrong if you made a mistake.

²⁰ a part that combines with other parts to form something bigger

²¹ one of the two soft, red edges of the mouth



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[00:14:21] Of course it's not perfect, it's a computer program, but it is a pretty cool feature.

[00:14:28] So Google is definitely your friend when it comes to easy to use pronunciation tools.

[00:14:35] You don't need to download an app or anything like that.

[00:14:38] Just go to google.com then type "how to pronounce", and then the word.

[00:14:45] Secondly, a fantastic thing that you can do to improve your pronunciation is something that you may well have heard me speaking about before, and that's something called shadowing.

[00:14:58] Shadowing is a pronunciation technique that involves you speaking out loud at the same time as a native speaker.

[00:15:08] You need to find a relatively short piece of audio, let's say something that's one to two minutes long and has a transcript provided.

[00:15:19] Then you should listen to it a few times to make sure that you understand what the speaker is saying and to make sure that you know how to pronounce any tricky, any difficult words.

[00:15:34] Then when you are confident that you can do this, you should actually speak out loud at the same time as the English speaker.



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[00:15:46] It will feel pretty strange to do at first, but after you've done it a few times it'll feel completely natural.

[00:15:55] It's one of the absolute best things that you can do to improve your pronunciation.

[00:16:01] You'll be speaking at exactly the same time as a native speaker, trying to pronounce words in exactly the same way as he or she is, and you'll soon find yourself naturally [mimicking²²](#), naturally [imitating²³](#), the pronunciation of the native speaker.

[00:16:20] You can, of course, use any kind of listening resource to do this.

[00:16:26] As you know, all of the English Learning for Curious Minds podcasts come with a transcript for you to follow along with, or you could of course use the animating transcript.

[00:16:38] But it doesn't really matter.

[00:16:39] The important thing is that you try it, and I'd be really surprised if you tried it and didn't see pretty quick results with your own pronunciation.

²² copying the way in which a particular person usually speaks and moves, usually in order to make people laugh

²³ to behave in a similar way to someone or something else, or to copy the speech or behaviour, etc. of someone or something



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[00:16:49] My third tip, which I wouldn't really even [classify](#)²⁴ as a tip as it should just be common sense, is to make sure that with anything you're doing to improve your pronunciation, make sure you are listening to a native speaker.

[00:17:07] Why, I never understand why, when there are hundreds of millions of native speakers all across the world, I never understand why people would choose to listen to someone who wasn't a native speaker.

[00:17:22] Of course, it's completely understandable with in-person stuff where you may not always have native speaker teachers in your country, but in terms of online stuff?

[00:17:35] So make sure you're listening to native speakers.

[00:17:39] [End of](#)²⁵.

[00:17:41] And my fourth, or, it's really third I guess because tip number three should have been so obvious, the fourth tip is what I call learn to love and appreciate your mouth.

[00:17:54] Obviously, the way you pronounce different words is based on where you position your [lips](#), your tongue, and mouth more generally.

²⁴ to divide things or people into groups according to their type, or to say which group or type something or someone belongs to

²⁵ used to say that 'no more needs to be said'



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[00:18:03] You know this already, but lots of people don't pay the attention that they should do to the position of their tongue and their [lips](#).

[00:18:13] There are [tonnes²⁶](#) of videos on YouTube with information on the position that your lips and tongue should be when you pronounce certain words and lots of pretty great resources if you just Google "English pronunciation tips".

[00:18:29] So rather than giving you specific tips, I just want to advise you to, from a more general point of view, to really focus on the position of your lips and mouth.

[00:18:43] [Pinpoint²⁷](#), discover, where you are making errors through listening to native speakers.

[00:18:49] Practice through shadowing, and make sure that you are able to recreate the sounds correctly through becoming aware of the positioning of your own lips and tongue.

[00:19:00] And here comes the final bit, which I think is the most fun part, and that's to record yourself speaking.

[00:19:09] Listen back to it and try to see where you made mistakes.

²⁶ many, a large number

²⁷ to find out or say the exact position in space or time of something



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[00:19:14] Let me start just by [acknowledging](#)²⁸ the fact that people generally hate the sound of their own voice.

[00:19:22] I have to listen to my own voice a lot.

[00:19:25] Recording and editing all of the episodes means that I've probably listened to my own voice in the past three months more than I had in the past 33 years.

[00:19:36] But you do get used to it.

[00:19:38] And from the point of view of improving your pronunciation, you need to get used to listening to the sound of your own voice.

[00:19:47] Listening to how you speak in English will do a few things for you.

[00:19:53] Firstly, for a lot of people, it will probably actually [boost](#)²⁹ your confidence.

[00:20:00] Most people think that they are worse at speaking, and that they have worse pronunciation, than they actually do.

[00:20:11] So if you listen to yourself you'll realise you're not as bad as you think you are.

[00:20:16] Secondly, it'll mean that you understand better the words that you aren't pronouncing correctly.

²⁸ to accept, admit, or recognise something, or the truth or existence of something

²⁹ to improve or increase something



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[00:20:24] It's really hard when you are speaking to understand when you are pronouncing a word incorrectly right there and then.

[00:20:32] But when you are able to listen to yourself speaking and can do things like pause and rewind to listen again, it's a lot easier.

[00:20:44] You can obviously record yourself saying anything, but it's more useful if you can find something where you can compare your version to the version of a native speaker.

[00:20:56] It just means it's easier to see where you make mistakes.

[00:21:00] And like shadowing, you can use anything, but if you're listening to this podcast, what better place to start than this?

[00:21:09] I tell you what, and I guess this is a bit of a strange challenge, but if you want to record yourself speaking any one of our podcasts [out loud³⁰](#), this one or any of the other 40 or so, then record it, email in the recording.

[00:21:29] I'd love to hear how you get on.

³⁰ if you say or read something out loud, you say or read it so that other people can hear you



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[00:21:31] And obviously I'll give you some [actionable](#)³¹ feedback on what you can do to improve, unless it's perfect, of course, and then I'll just give you a bit of a virtual [pat on the back](#)³².

[00:21:43] So there you go, if you're interested, record yourself speaking part of one of the podcasts, send it in to HI - hi@leonardoenglish.com - and I will personally correct it and send it back to you.

[00:21:59] That's quite a fun challenge right?

[00:22:02] Okay.

[00:22:02] [In the interests of](#)³³ keeping this episode to a [manageable](#)³⁴ time, we are going to leave it there for today's episode on pronunciation.

[00:22:12] It is a fascinating area of English learning, one that's very interesting to me personally and one that many English learners don't completely appreciate.

[00:22:23] So I hope that this episode has been useful.

[00:22:27] As always, thank you for your ongoing membership of Leonardo English.

³¹ if advice is actionable, you can take action based on it

³² (informal) praise

³³ in order to

³⁴ easy or possible to deal with



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[00:22:31] It wouldn't be possible without you and you guys are the reason that I do the show.

[00:22:38] For those of you who haven't ever written in to say hello, then please do.

[00:22:43] I love hearing from you whether you have just joined today or you've been a member for a few months.

[00:22:49] And now that you have the excuse of sending in a [clip³⁵](#), a voice [clip](#) to help you improve your pronunciation.

[00:22:56] There has never been a better time.

[00:22:58] So that's hi hi@leonardoenglish.com.

[00:23:03] Okay, that is it for today then.

[00:23:06] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:23:10] I'm Alastair Budge.

[00:23:12] Stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

³⁵ a short part of a film or television programme



Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Bust	break, prove wrong
Myths	a commonly believed but false idea
Clear up	clarify
Distinctive	something that is distinctive is easy to recognise because it is different from other things
Stress	the way that a word or syllable is pronounced with greater force than other words in the same sentence or other syllables in the same word
Necessarily	used in negatives to mean "in every case" or "therefore"
True self	the real you
Speech defect	a difficulty in speaking clearly
Give up	to stop trying
Subconscious	the part of your mind that notices and remembers information when you are not actively trying to do so, and influences your behaviour even though you do not realise it
Bias	the action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing in an



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unfair way, because of allowing personal opinions to influence your judgment

Trustworthy

able to be trusted

Truthfulness

the quality of being honest and not containing or telling any lies

Switches off

stop paying attention

Fluid

smooth and continuous

Dreaded

used to refer to something that you do not like or want

Struggle

to experience difficulty and make a very great effort in order to do something

Reproduce

to make again

Let you into

to tell you something (normally secret)

Component

a part that combines with other parts to form something bigger

Lips

one of the two soft, red edges of the mouth

Mimicking

copying the way in which a particular person usually speaks and moves, usually in order to make people laugh

Imitating

to behave in a similar way to someone or something else, or to copy the speech or behaviour, etc. of someone or something



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Classify	to divide things or people into groups according to their type, or to say which group or type something or someone belongs to
End of	used to say that 'no more needs to be said'
Tonnes	many, a large number
Pinpoint	to find out or say the exact position in space or time of something
Acknowledging	to accept, admit, or recognise something, or the truth or existence of something
Boost	to improve or increase something
Out loud	if you say or read something out loud, you say or read it so that other people can hear you
Actionable	if advice is actionable, you can take action based on it
Pat on the back	(informal) praise
In the interests of	in order to
Manageable	easy or possible to deal with
Clip	a short part of a film or television programme

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.



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What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

You can email us at hi@leonardoenglish.com.

