

## To What Extent Does Incorrect Pronunciation Alter Meaning

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article targets a feature of the language which is essential in foreign language acquisition. All the skills are important to acquire when we are learning a foreign or a second language. However, only the oral skill can immediately assess your mastery of the language and more specifically the pronouncing ability. Good and accurate pronunciation facilitates communication and allows interaction and feedback. It avoids ambiguities and misunderstanding with the listener. As his pronunciation is correct, the speaker is given interest and consideration, he feels comfortable and can challenge all issues. The situation is completely different when the speaker 's oral production is approximate or somehow weak. It delays comprehension and the conversation is not pleasant. There is much effort from parts, the speaker and the hearer. Good speaking abilities open many opportunities social and professional opportunities to the speaker. Pronunciation appears in every language skill acquisition. Listening and speaking, which is obvious, also in reading as the reader should know the pronunciation of the word and finally in writing because the learner is already familiar with the spelling form of the words.*

**KEYWORDS:** speaker, language, pronunciation, communication, facilitating

**ملخص:** هذا المقال يتكلم عن ميزة مهمة من صفات اللغات في اكتساب لغة أجنبية. كل الصفات لهم أهمية عند اكتساب غير لغة الأم لكن التحكم في النطق الشفوي يسمح بتقييم محدد عن ممارسة اللغة. عندما يكون النطق سليم تساهم في التواصل والتبادل البناء مع المحاور. عندما يكون مستعمل اللغة فصيح ومتحكم فيها يعطى له الاعتبار والاحترام وتسمح له بالتدخل والتحاور في جميع الميادين، لكن تنعكس الحالة عندما تكون الإنتاج الشفوي ضعيف أو تقريبي. تنقل عملية الفهم وتصبح المحاور ناقصة. التحكم في نطق اللغة الأجنبية يعطي لمستعملها أفضليات مهنية واجتماعية.

النطق السليم هو إسمنت اللغة لأن المستعمل الذي يتحكم في النطق يتحكم تلقائيا في النحو والكتابة لهذه اللغة. وكننتيجة تسهل له إتقان كل الميزات المتبقية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اكتساب، لغة، نطق، تحاور

## Introduction

The dictionary defines elocution as the art of speaking well. It includes a clear voice and a good pronunciation. It is of major importance that language teachers and mainly foreign language teachers carry this feature. They are the only model for learners when they are non-natives. Often, rich vocabulary and knowledge of grammar rules is what most people see as essential for being capable of communicating in English or in any other language effectively. There is certainly some truth in these words, yet it cannot be applied in all situations.

### To what extent does pronunciation matter in speech?

My long phonetics teaching experience has made me obsessed with pronunciation. It is for me the most fascinating part of learning and practicing a language which is above all not ours.

I personally find it interesting to study pronunciation in theory and I have always worked to improve it in practice because for me it matters more than we think.

There is no such thing as having really bad pronunciation in a foreign language and still being able to communicate perfectly. The connection between pronunciation and speaking is immediately apparent when learning a foreign language. But pronunciation is also about listening. It is not enough to recognize a word in writing, because if you don't know how it's pronounced you won't recognize it when someone else uses the word. When your pronunciation is bad, it does influence albeit not always in an obvious manner effective communication. The more complex and less predictable your utterances are, the more important your pronunciation becomes. Imagine that the listener needs to guess what sounds you are trying to produce; he will undoubtedly find it harder to understand the ideas you want to convey.

Being able to pronounce words and understand other speakers can be of critical importance in certain situations. A good pronunciation can contribute a lot to leaving a good first impression.

Proper pronunciation can be defined as the reproduction of language sounds in such a way that intended message is passed easily and is properly understood by a fluent speaker of the language in question. For communication to be achieved effectively, besides use of correct grammar forms, pronunciation is of crucial importance.

Native speakers can perceive bad pronunciation as a lack of language competence. Speakers with strong accents can be hard to understand or even unpleasant to listen to. Social interaction can be significantly impeded by this; such a person is likely to face difficulties in getting through native speakers.

Correct pronunciation is a basis for efficient communication in English or in any other language. It is so nice and so comfortable for the ear when the communication is achieved in a good and appropriate way.

It is easy to say that there is not one pronunciation of English, but there are many 'Englishes' as there are many regional dialects, but to a non native speaker this is of little importance. What non native speakers should work on is losing accents of their respective mother tongue and practicing correct and authentic pronunciation.

For English and some Asian languages which are specific with tones, all areas of pronunciation matter: stress, intonation, rhythm, because if any of them is misused the message is broken. In English for example *average* is a word of two syllables: Even though it has the same written form, a French speaker can fail to recognize it and pronounce it with three syllable, whereas a Spanish or an Italian would expect four syllables if they do not hear the word before, this explain why it is important to listen to native speakers and have them as models. Non native speakers who have advanced high acceptability level may also be taken as models as long as their sound production is similar or approximates the pronunciation of native speakers. A great number of non native speakers use correctly the target language, either because they pay a great deal of attention to the articulation of the sounds or because they are entrenched with the language.

### **Pronunciation counts for less in sending the message**

Many would ask why bother as long as I can make myself understood. It is an easy and common attitude which I find wrong and negative. Pronunciation is not a discipline for experts. All mistakes in a language affect in some way or another communication. For communication to work properly, the sounds produced must be correctly categorized by native speakers. It is one thing when words are pronounced in isolation, but the issue is different when they are part of a sequence. The final sound in *Write* is /t/ but it becomes /tS/ in *write your name* only because of assimilation. Only native speakers produce naturally the suprasegmental features of a language. Assimilation, aspiration, liaison and other characteristics of the English language and using them appropriately renders communication authentic.

We don't need however to sound exactly like native speakers to be understood. More technically, we mean that our speech needs to be good enough to lead to phonemically accurate judgments by native speakers.

But we don't need perfect phonetic accuracy. In short it means that it's fine if your pronunciation is a bit off but it shouldn't be too off to make it hard for native speakers to correctly process the sound.

Obviously, the context helps the listener understand what you are saying. But the idea here is that if you burden the listeners with problems, they will have a harder time understand what you are saying.

You can of course be understood with a heavy accent in a language, but usually only after the listener has become used to the way you speak or if they are familiar with your accent from previous experience.

Bad pronunciation can result in failure to convey the message and can cause trouble in communication when they are least expected and welcomed even among native speakers.

It may happen that a simple slip of the tongue creates misunderstanding, what if sounds are constantly misarticulated, the conversation becomes then unintelligible and not worth being pursued.

English has many different accents, each of them with its peculiarities regarding pronunciation. American Midwest as well as English speakers from some regions pronounce a number of words with nasal accents. Speakers of the US tend to elongate the vowels and not use the diphthongs

instead, however these are recognized dialects of English and native speakers tend to identify and to understand them.

It is obvious that this article concerns non native speakers communicating with native speakers of a language.

When the interlocutors are foreign speakers, it is clear that they may produce the same mispronunciation, but there is a tacit agreement between them to get around the constraint. Either a new variant is used that usually shares approximant features with the foreign language articulation or simply create a new sound that is conventionally adopted collectively.

Apart from the fact that we don't want to put a burden on the listener, the second reason that pronunciation is important is that it partly determines how other people regard you and your language ability as second or foreign language learners.

To be more explicit, most other language skills are mediated through speech, at least in everyday day life and real- life interaction.

Language vehicles cultural aspects of life and interacting means discussing all and every event be it, sports, political, social, literary and others. You need to be involved in all themes.

If we can't talk about them, people aren't going to be impressed. It is a good test to prove the passive skills.

When learning a foreign language, there are two attitudes the learner can adopt; mutual intelligibility whereby the speaker aims only at sending and receiving the message or high acceptability where the learner aims at such an advanced level in all skills that he/she would not be recognized as a non-native.

Pronunciation is different from the other skills. It strikes the listener directly in the face, (more specifically the ears). How good your pronunciation is can be judged very quickly and an opinion is formed automatically by anyone who hears you. People give you a different look that shows deference, interest and acceptability. Experience has shown that unconsciously people with a good pronunciation are overestimated (according to the argument above).

When pronunciation is correct, the message is grasped simultaneously and the conversation becomes fluent, flowing and comfortable to the ears. A single sentence pronounced well and

at a natural pace will be convincing to most people that converse with you in the same language instead of feeling obliged to adopt a different language attitude. It is as if you have won a language struggle. On the contrary when there is mispronunciation, the understanding process is delayed throughout the discussion and we don't want to go further. The conversation is cut sharp rather than having to stretch your ears to guess the meaning or interrupt our interlocutor to ask for repetition. So pronunciation does matters and it matters regardless if you care or not. You might know that your foreign language is awesome, but if pronunciation is the weakest of your skills, it's bound to have a big impact on how you are perceived by others.

Since this can be very important both in a private, social and in a professional situation, I believe focusing more on pronunciation is an intelligent attitude to adopt.

### **Good Pronunciation: a chance in workplaces**

It is said that you only have one chance to make a first good impression, and bad pronunciation can ruin that chance, since people making pronunciation mistake or having strong foreign accents as often perceived with much circumspection. This can affect their chances of getting a promotion or better job opportunities.

### **-It saves time**

In today's highly competitive and global business landscape, being able to communicate quickly and effectively gives employees and entire organizations an edge over less articulate competitors. Having good grammar in the workplace can ease employee relations with colleagues and clients and can even be a key factor in a future promotion. Being able to communicate effectively in the workplace is a key time management skill and having a good grasp on proper grammar can help ensure messages are delivered and received promptly. Good grammar helps to lessen confusion when an employee decides to file a complaint, send an instant message to a project team member or voice her opinion in a staff meeting. Delivering a grammatically correct message can also reduce time wasted on translation and follow-up, potentially leading to higher productivity.

### **-It saves face**

Good pronunciation affects how others feel about and respond to each other, which carries a lot of importance in the business arena. Making an impression on customers and colleagues through the usage of proper language can help an employee maintain an air of professionalism and can help show others that he really cares about his job and his company's products or services.

### **-It saves money**

Given the fact that most businesses today are global and include geographically dispersed work teams, oral communications have become even more essential to the daily operations of an organization. Whether in the form of chats, e. internal business reports, brainstorming, or official meetings, incorrect use of the language could spell disaster for a company in a situation where the information presented is false or misleading.

### **-It saves Job**

Employees who use good and correct language are more likely to succeed at their jobs because their speech will reflect a "level of professional competency" that will be noticed by supervisors and clients, according to global communication skills company Communicaid. Establishing this level of superior communication skills could be one of the main factors that lead to a promotion in title or pay in the future.

Pronunciation is the most important and difficult problem that non-native English speakers have to face when studying English. Improper pronunciation can lead to negative impression, misunderstanding and ineffective communication. This page is designed to indicate some negative impacts of poor pronunciation and to provide you with some tips for the improvement.

### **-It gives a negative impression**

When you talk to people in the real life, your pronunciation is the first thing they notice during a conversation. In everyday communication, you usually do not have to use many complicated words, so your limited vocabulary is not a big issue since you can use more simple words to express the word that you do not know. In fact, they will notice right away

if your pronunciation is good or bad only the first few simple words. If you have a poor pronunciation with very strong foreign accent, they will think of you as a bad English speaker and your good vocabulary and grammar cannot help you.

**- Communication is ineffective**

You are making it difficult for people who listen to you with your strong foreign accent. It is irritating for other people if they have to keep asking you to repeat, but they still cannot figure out what you are saying. Consequently, if it takes a lot of efforts to understand your English, people will avoid communicating with you as much as they can. In contrast, they will enjoy talking to you when you have a pleasant accent that is easy for them hear and understand you.

Business language skills are critical needs in this modern era of globalization and cut-throat competition.

An employee that has competency in business language skills is likely to be able to climb up the career ladder with ease. And that applies to businesses as a whole, too: a recent study conducted by Bersin and Associates reveals that organizations that are able to communicate their strategies in a clear and precise manner are 113 times more likely to achieve higher levels of profitability and efficiency.

A similar study conducted by Global English reveals that 97% of employees surveyed believe that poor communication as a result of inadequate business language skills can create misunderstanding.

A staggering 83% of employees report that poor business language skills have resulted in a negative impact on sales, profitability and efficiency of operations in their organizations.

It is therefore imperative that anyone who wants to succeed in business, managers and workers alike, focuses on improving business language skills.

Gaining competency over this particular skill will allow you to communicate with your peers, subordinates, supervisors, and clients easily and clearly, and this will bring an increase in productivity that will ultimately result in higher profitability.



## Conclusion

Knowing a lot of vocabularies is meaningless if you cannot pronounce those words correctly and no one can understand the words that you are trying to use. Even worse, pronunciation mistakes can lead to some serious misunderstanding. Good pronunciation requires articulating the words properly and this is the main topic of interest in phonetic classes. Most of the language skills are best learned through practical use more than through classroom activities. Listening to native speakers is by far the most effective method of learning to speak a language. Conversation with native speakers can be embarrassing and frustrating for adult learners, which is why children, who are less prone to embarrassment of this kind are quicker learners and tend to acquire pronunciation in a much better way.

EFL and ESL teachers should realize that pronunciation is the cement that holds everything. Robin walker, a teacher educator and a materials writer, together with a team of pedagogues explained at the 2008 IATEFL conference in Exeter, that poor pronunciation often lies undetected behind the poor reading skills of foreign learners. They acknowledged that to get better at reading, teachers should improve the learners' pronunciation.

It should be obviously admitted that there is a close link between pronunciation and writing and that pronunciation and reading are simply not connected.

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