

IF YOU WANT THEM TO HEAR YOU, SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE!

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**By Rhoberta Shaler**

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You've probably noticed that there are some problems with our communication system. We have to use words. They are often imprecise, awkward and unable to capture the essence of what we want to say.

Problem #1. Words mean different things to different folks. Even when we find what we consider to be adequate words, the listener hears something else.

Problem #2. It is difficult to capture feelings in words. And, equally difficult to remove feelings from words. What a conundrum.

Problem #3. Listeners may not be listening. There's a big difference between listening and hearing: only the former engages the mind. Many folks begin formulating their response after you say the first ten words.

Problem #4. The listener's prior experiences colour your words for them. You are not alone. They are hearing every person who has ever spoken to them in your way or with your words as you speak. Therefore, they decide where to place their attention and what their focus will be.

Problem #5. And, we wonder why communication is difficult? It's enough to make you close your mouth forever!

Now, aside from those five problems, there are other considerations. Here are some simple and significant ways to

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increase your chances of being accurately heard and, hopefully, listened to. Consider the following questions:

1. Do you know what is important to your listener? Are they more interested in facts or feelings? Demonstrate your desire to communicate with them by leading with what is of greater interest to them.

2. Do you know if your listener is more interested in the details or the decision? Some folks are more comfortable with assessing and planning solutions than with making decisions and implementing them. To whom are you speaking? It is difficult to get a "decide

and do" attitude from an "assess and solve" person. Similarly, it is more difficult to engage an "assessor" in a decision making conversation. They will usually want to keep perfecting their plan. Acknowledge this and affirm their skill before asking them to decide.

3. Is your listener results- or relationship-oriented? Spending any time at all with small talk may drive a results-oriented listener to distraction. Conversely, offering no small talk can push away a relationship-oriented person. Lead with their interest and then you can present your point, or your point-of-view.

4. How is your timing for the conversation you wish to have? If it could be in any way confrontative, be careful. Taking just five minutes to assess a situation prior to bringing up an issue can be very informative. Listen. Pick up the 'climate' around your proposed listener. As with the philosophy of 'pick your battles', so, it is wise to pick your times to increase the probability of being heard.

5. Are you clear about what you wish to say? Wading into a conversation without clarity can find you drowning in misunderstanding quickly. Think about the outcome you wish to create before you open your mouth. This will help you temper and tailor your approach to reach your desired goal.

A quick way to measure the appropriateness of your communication is to ask yourself, "Am I willing to be spoken to in the way I am about to speak?" If the answer is 'Yes', proceed with assurance. If the answer is 'No', be very thankful you took that minute to think.

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Communication can be tricky, but most tricks can be mastered.

Rhoberta Shaler, PhD, speaks, coaches & conducts seminars forentrepreneurs & professionals who want the motivation, strategiesand inspiration to achieve, to lead and to live richly. Hear herweekly on <http://www.WSRadio.com> Visit<http://www.OptimizeLifeNow.com> today!

### **English Pronunciation For The ESL Learner**

**By Lynn Bo**

What is an accent? An accent is the carryover of sounds from the speaker's original language to the second language. When we are infants we literally have the ability to speak any language in the world. We are all born with the necessary speech mechanisms and the capability to learn any language. We end up speaking the language that we do solely by reinforcement. The sounds a baby hears and the speech patterns he is exposed to are the ones that she develops. Soon the baby gains the fine motor skill and control she needs to create sounds herself. The infant will begin by babbling and playing with sounds. Soon she is able to produce simple vowel/consonant combinations which maybe why mama and dada are often their first words, they can make the combination and the big reaction it elicits reinforces their efforts. By 18 months she will be able to produce about 20 words that have meaning and understand around 50 words. Now babies of course have the ultimate immersion experience. In order to obtain any control over their environment they must learn the language and they are surrounded by the language almost 24 hours a day.

Of course the second language learner does not have these advantages. Even if you are now living in an English speaking country, and attending classes to learn English you will still have opportunity to speak and hear your first language with friends and family, this is especially true in America a county of immigrants where finding a community of people with the same language background is possible.

Another challenge is the expectation factor. For many years you have heard a speech pattern and there is an expectation of what you will hear when others speak. You are predicting what sounds will come next based on your subconscious knowledge of language. I call this listening with an accent. It is necessary to break through this barrier, to really hear how others are speaking, to actively listen.

To listen is to learn, and I don't mean that in an existential way. I really mean that if you can't hear the way the sounds are produced you cannot learn how to produce the sound. Maybe that is why ETS added speaking and listening sections to the TOEFL. The two skills are so closely linked.

Once you can hear the sounds you must add them to your own phonetic library. This means that you have in your mind the knowledge and understanding of how to produce every sound or phoneme in you original language. Now you must add on some sounds that are in the American sound system that is not in your original language sounds system. Record your self reading a brief paragraph. Only 2–3 sentences in English. Then listen to the recording. Write down exactly what you hear on the recording. Not what you meant to say but what you really did say. How is it different from what was written? Did you say th, when it was written or did you say d? I would suggest sticking with the consonants at first because the differences are easier to pinpoint.

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If you would like to get help in improving your pronunciation it would be best to go to a speech therapist rather than an ESL teacher. Speech therapists are trained in physiology of the speech mechanisms and musculature. They understand what is involved in producing each sound and are trained to identify and work with articulation problems. Though an accent is not the same as an articulation problem they have similar characteristics. When a client has difficulty articulating specific sounds the speech therapist can hear and see what they are doing differently and describe and show how to do it correctly. When a client has an accent the speech therapist can see what the person is doing differently and show and describe how to make the sound so it more closely approximates the

standard.

The most important advice I can give you is to keep practicing. At first it may feel like you are exaggerating when you "speak with an American accent" but I am sure that the native American speakers around you will not even notice. They will merely be impressed with your great diction!

Lynn Bo is a speech therapist and an expert in the field of accent reduction who possesses advanced training in accent reduction and phonology. She is also the founder of

a

line of accent reduction software programs. She can be reached at

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