

UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM

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Special points of interest:

- What's Reverse Accent Mimicry? (p.2)
- Is there a "preferred" American dialect? (p.3)
- Try an effective way to expand your vocabulary. (p.3)
- What can a non-native speaker of English do to improve besides taking classes? (p.4)

MEET JONATHAN FUSILERO



Jonathan is in the field of Occupational Therapy. He is the Director of a rehabilitation clinic that contracts with convalescent hospitals, nursing homes, and sub-acute hospitals to provide health care services to their patients nationwide. He oversees the operation, made up of both sub-acute and skilled nursing cases. His staff includes occupational, physical, and speech therapists. Jonathan is responsible for insuring optimal patient care, and for him, "connection" is key.

Jonathan's career plans have always centered around the health care field. During his studies, he was drawn to occupational therapy because he could help people with a broader range of issues, from

the psychological to the physical. He also likes the "hands-on" aspect of working directly with the patients and really helping them.

"It feels good just to help people ... just to connect with them. The focus is on what you can give and how you can help rather than what's in it for you. It's not just about the therapy itself - the exercises - it's about connecting with people, asking how they are feeling and how their families are doing. It's all about building trust and rapport."

"When people don't understand you, it can be a deterrent to building that relationship. It's important to know what people's goals are so we can add to their quality of life. Our focus is on helping bed-bound and ambulatory patients be as independent as possible by overcoming obstacles, such as in-coordination or weakness. For health reasons, some patients cannot feed themselves, take showers, or go shopping. If these are their goals, it's important for their therapy to focus on achieving their full potential based on their stage in life and their personal desires. Our services are very client-centered."

To improve his communication skills, Jonathan actively works on his intonation and word stress patterns, pronunciation and breathing. Adapting American speaking patterns makes it easier for him to understand and be understood.

Jonathan enjoys occupational therapy because it adds "life to years" rather than "years to life."

www.EnglishbytheHour.com

“Learn the International Phonetic Alphabet and you won’t have to rely on others to pronounce difficult words.”

RESOURCES FOR NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH



There are number of resources that assist non-native speakers in learning English online. **Some of the best/my personal favorites include:**

Dave’s ESL Café:
<http://www.eslcafe.com/>

Lots of interactive forums and resources for both instructors and students!

About English as a Second Language
<http://esl.about.com/>

Extensive list of topics for beginners to advanced: pronunciation, vocabulary, TOEFL ... it’s all there!

Buzzwhack
<http://www.buzzwhack.com/buzzcomp/indac.htm>

The ultimate source for new vocabulary words that may not be in the dictionary yet.

Longman’s IPA Dictionary
<http://www.ldoconline.com/>
Learn the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and stop relying on others to figure out how to pronounce a new word ... and it’s FREE.

“Perhaps ‘reverse accent mimicry’ is just a way to use Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) on yourself.”

WHAT THE HECK IS “REVERSE ACCENT MIMICRY?”

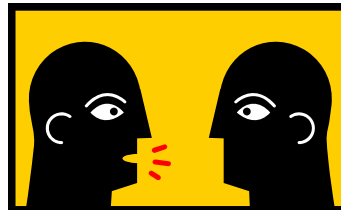
Fake it to Make it?

Laurence Hilton of the University of Nebraska at Kearney answers this question in his article “Reverse Accent Mimicry: An Accent Reduction Technique for Second Language Learners”
<http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Hilton-AccentReduction.html>

The idea is that by mimicking the speech and non-verbal behaviors of native speakers in another culture, while simultaneously speaking the language, you can acquire—you guessed it—a less noticeable accent! Suddenly and unexpectedly, people will understand you and respond to you in a way that will allow you to become “one” with the culture around you.

But ... does it work?

Well, the author claims it worked for him learning French.



The question is - will it work for everyone in any language?

It seems to require a natural talent for observing new patterns and then “letting go” long enough to try them on.

Perhaps those who are already linguistically-talented or have a “have a good ear” will do better than those who aren’t and don’t!

How is it really different from Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP)?

Does it really matter whether you are picking up on and changing the patterns in your

own speech or whether someone is teaching you how to do it? Isn’t the result the same? Perhaps “reverse accent mimicry” is just a way to use NLP on yourself.

After all, NLP is all about making transformational changes in how we process information to modify our behaviors and create immediate, life-altering results.

NLP goes far beyond merely speaking a language. It affects every aspect of how we see ourselves and our interactions with the world.
http://www.holistic-online.com/ho_l_neurolinguistic.htm#Presuppositions

More on NLP and its applications in the area of accent reduction and language in upcoming editions of Unconventional Wisdom ...

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE AN “AMERICAN” ACCENT?

Who has the ideal American accent in the US?

Is it the Midwest? Eastern? California?

Is the southern drawl “atrocious” or “down-home”?

Besides being a matter of opinion, there’s some interesting sociolinguistic rhetoric on the topic.

<http://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/americanvarieties/midwest/>



So here’s the QUIZ

Do you pronounce “cot” the same or differently from the word “caught”?

How about “Don” and “Dawn”?

How would a linguist describe the Californian dialect?

<http://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/americanvarieties/californian/>

How does language change anyway?

<http://www.pbs.org/speak/ahead/change/change/>

Will dialects thrive or will a universal language emerge? See the June issue for details!

“Do you pronounce ‘cot’ and ‘caught’ the same or differently? ... Where did you say you were from???”



ACTIVE VS. PASSIVE VOCABULARY

When you are reading and run into a word you don’t know, how often do you stop to look it up?

If you’re like most people, you don’t. You may guess about the meaning based on the context, and if you see the word a few times, it is likely to become a part of your “passive” vocabulary. However, you will probably never end up using challenging words yourself, unless you have a plan to make them part of your “active” vocabulary.

How do you do that? Make it point to look up recurrent or interesting words that you have heard or read but don’t use. Keep a database of them or at a minimum, write them down, but most importantly, write down not just the word, but its “common collocation”. That is write down how the word is commonly used.

For example, if “a priori” is a new word for you, write down a short definition like “thought that comes before experience”. Then write down “Mathematics is an *a priori* subject because we can understand it without experiencing it - $2+2=4$ ”.

Next, write down its opposite or a related word that is the same or different in meaning, one you might confuse it with: in this case “a posteriori” - “which means you have to learn through experience.” Sample sentence: “Natural science is an *a posteriori* field because you have to experience it first.”

The point is that if you jot down isolated information, it will not be relevant or interesting to you later, and you won’t remember it. So, if it is your goal to increase your vocabulary, you must make a concentrated effort to give yourself enough information to work with.

And then what do you do?

Look for opportunities to use the word or expression in your everyday life. Challenge yourself by talking to people you know have large vocabularies or specialized ones in specific fields. Don’t be afraid to ask people what the words they are using mean, as long as you are doing it in a comfortable environment (not during their keynote speech!) And if someone doesn’t take your request seriously, make sure you look up the word yourself and add it to your growing database!

Lastly, review all of the new words by scanning through the list on a biweekly or monthly basis. If you never look at the words, you won’t start using them, so give yourself painless ways to use them, and you will reap the benefit by significantly increasing your vocabulary!

“You will probably never end up using challenging words yourself, unless you have a plan to make them part of your “active” vocabulary.”



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from you. Email your
questions to:*

*info@englishbythe
hour.com*

Q. I'm a manager who has non-native speakers of English working for me. During our one-on-ones, they ask me what they can do to improve their English besides taking classes. Do you have any suggestions?

A. Here are a few suggestions for non-native speakers who want to improve their English above and beyond taking classes:

- **Spend time with Native Speakers and just Listen** - pay attention to their speaking patterns - are they different from yours? Gain an awareness and see what changes you can adopt just by mimicking the patterns.
- **Join Toastmasters** - there's no better way to improve your speaking in front of a group than by doing it - not only does practice make perfect, but native speakers won't normally correct you. If you join TM, people will be happy to give you suggestions and advice.
- **Watch American movies** - turn on closed captioning so you can read the words along with the movie - focus on idioms and new expressions - look for opportunities to use the new words in your everyday conversations.
- **Hire a Coach** - whether you need help with writing, speaking, or life's challenge, a personal coach can save you hours of time and help you focus on what's really important.
- **Take Risks** - if you're afraid of making mistakes and never take risks, you won't improve. Join groups and talk, even if they don't understand you every time or have to ask you to repeat - do it anyway. Eventually it will get easier. Without practice, nothing will change.
- **Read what you Love** - if you only study what you have to for work or school, you may get the job done or the degree you are working on, but it won't be much fun. If you read what inspires and interests you, you'll find it easier to remember the words and expressions. Your learning will increase by leaps and bounds!
- **Record Yourself** - audio or video, make a recording of yourself speaking to help you identify areas for change. It may be painful, but awareness paves the way for change.
- **Keep a journal in English** - there's no obligation to be perfect; no one will read it but you - the idea is for your thoughts to flow in English rather than your primary language.
- **Learn to use the BREATH when you Speak** - in many languages of the world, only the chest area is used for breathing. In English, it helps to open your mouth wide, releasing air as you speak. This will make your speech more pleasing to the American ear.

