

UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM

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GIVE THE GIFT OF COMMUNICATION

Looking for a different type of gift? You might consider giving a gift certificate to a non-native speaker in your life for personal coaching in American English: accent reduction, vocabulary-building, grammar & writing or presentations.



Certificates are available both for self-study and personal (1-1) coaching. The recipient can use the certificate in any dollar amount towards the package of his/her choice.

In fact, lately I've found that clients prefer the flexibility to choose what to include their sessions depending on their work requirements and goals.

The beauty of personal coaching is the flexibility in scheduling and the ability to customize the sessions to fit the client's needs.

I recently put together a new class sequence around the concept of emailing. The idea is to practice writing politically-correct emails in challenging situations. Many people

from other countries struggle with how to communicate in difficult situations. While the grammar and structure may be familiar, the content and wordsmithing can be difficult.

In the email course, I give clients categories, such as *"agreeing with reservations"*, *"holding your ground"* or *"backing down with dignity."* Then they have examples of specific emails written under these conditions in a variety of different environments.

After studying and reviewing the examples, participants get the opportunity to draft their own "assignment" emails on a variety of topics. The emails they draft are then used during the sessions to discuss the concepts involved in sending a clear message without an offensive delivery.

This is one example of the type of personal coaching that can help a non-native speaker communicate more effectively in the workplace. Call for details: (408) 429-3557.

www.EnglishbytheHour.com

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I’ve recently been experimenting with teaching accent reduction over the internet, and I find that the Skype product offers a reliable and high quality method of doing this.

This last week I conducted a trial session with a woman in China, and it worked remarkably well. While it wasn’t quite as clear as the discussion I had with a local person using SKype, the repetitions were not significant. It was still very practical to use the rubber band technique and to see the person’s reactions and responses.

We ran into a challenging correction where the student wasn’t able to distinguish between two sounds. It tested my comfort level to try find a way to help her make the distinction creatively.

Face-to-face is still the easier and more comfortable way to communicate. You can clearly read the other person and judge whether progress is being made; however, it may be an issue of familiarity.

I know that even teaching courses using VOIP without video became more comfortable over time. Part of it was working with the same group of people and setting expectations, however, I did feel their were some intangible qualities lost in the sessions.



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Part of the equation is the cultural knowledge you share even with the people from other countries because you both live in California. There are certain commonalities. With the global audience, you can’t make assumptions about what they will be

interested in or what they will respond to.

I look forward to developing specific content for targeted ethnic groups. The goal will be to define exactly what issues need to be addressed in each region.

By defining what specific pronunciation, word stress, intonation and breathing issues a group of speakers are likely to have in common, the material can be customized to reduce the time frame it takes to make significant changes, eliminating the need for a linguistic analysis for each individual.

Of course, all of this is time consuming and speculative because there are many diverse regions and dialects. I plan to focus on several key groups and define which regions and specific areas to target.

The visual component and higher sound quality and reliability Skype offers goes a long way towards making this type of training possible.

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT VOCABULARY LEARNING - RESOURCES FOR NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

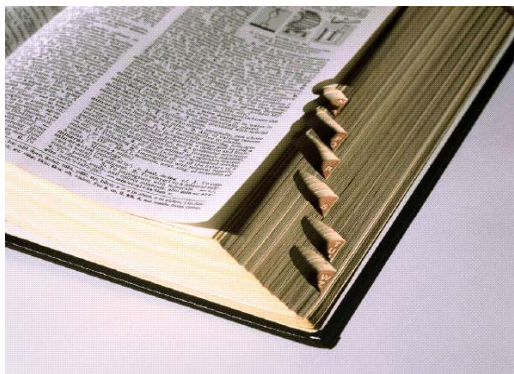
As a non-native speaker, it is always a challenge to learn new vocabulary. Many of my students ask me what they can use to get there, and here are a few ideas.

First, there is the *Verbal Advantage* program. You've probably heard it advertised on the radio -- the Charles Elster Harrington program that works by building your vocabulary through levels from easiest to more complex words with comprehension and usage drills built in.
www.verbaladvantage.com

It is a great program, but probably more so for native speakers. For non-native speakers, it's important to insure you have the correct pronunciation and "common collocations" along with the words' meaning. In other words, you must know how to use the word, including what other words go with it. Otherwise, it's not going to be terribly helpful to you.

Let's face it, learning new vocabulary isn't the most interesting task in the world. So how can you make it more enjoyable?

For many non-native speakers, it's important to



have some way of "testing" the acquisition of new vocabulary. The following site has an entertaining way of presenting the material, and if you scroll down to the bottom, you will find a number of "quizzes" that can be engaging.

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>

I find that adults are all about experiential learning, especially with language learning. If adding words to your vocabulary is reduced to "memorizing the dictionary," no one is going to do it. Even if someone does, will that person remember and use the words learned?

Another great resource is the Alta ESL bookstore in Burlingame. While you can shop online, it's a better idea to go in person if you are within driving distance. They have a sitting room by the warehouse, and you can inspect the books before you buy. <http://www.altaesl.com>.

Another good source is <http://www.eslcafe.com/> Lots of great resources that you can apply to every area of English as a Second Language Learning.

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Q. What's the next step after accent reduction to speaking with confidence?

Many non-native speakers ask this question, and the answer is it depends largely on the individual's needs and goals. The next step in English learning is often vocabulary-building since many non-native speakers are limited in this area or feel comfortable communicating because they struggle to find the right word. Another possibility is presentations because once a person can speak more clearly, s/he may be ready to deliver presentations in front of an audience. Another area for growth is listening comprehension. Especially for non-native speakers new to the US, the idiomatic expressions and figurative language used by native speakers can be confusing and challenging. Even watching American movies with the subtitles on and joining discussion groups can be helpful - anything to increase the hours spent hearing American English.

What not to do? Speaking only your primary language when you are not at work or in public will limit your improvement. If your immediate family speaks your language, this can be a challenge. While there is certainly nothing wrong with speaking your own language with your family, you need to take the initiative to find opportunities to practice your American English or you will lose what you have gained in the study of accent reduction. As they say, practice makes perfect! Actively seek out speaking opportunities, work vocabulary-building, and create an awareness for yourself around the areas you are attempting to change.

Q. What's the best way to increase my vocabulary?

The most important thing to remember about vocabulary is that it's all about using words with comfort and confidence. If you recognize a word when someone says it, but you would never use it, is it really part of your vocabulary? Actually, it is part of your **passive** vocabulary, and your goal is to make it **active**.

How you do this? Reading is a good way to find words that you are important in your field of interest or study. Once you locate these words, notice more than just the word in isolation. Pay attention to its environment: what preposition is it used with? What other words generally go with it? For example, the word "accountability" is a noun. The adjective is "accountable". If you want to use this word correctly, you need to know that the correct verb and preposition to use with it is "to be accountable for" or "to hold someone accountable for something". Creating a database with this type of information, reviewing it regularly, and making an effort to use their words in your daily speech will go a long way towards making your passive vocabulary active.

