

WHY DO SECOND LANGUAGE SPEAKERS HAVE DIFFICULTIES WITH PRONUNCIATION?

The main reason is that the *sound system* from the native language is being transferred into the second language. Children learning languages have very little difficulty learning new sound systems, so a child who learns a new language before the age of eleven will generally learn it without an accent. Adults must apply themselves *consciously* to learn a new system. New patterns are hard to learn, but it can be done with commitment and practice.

There are *three* main ways the sound system may be different:

You can encounter a sound that is not in your native language

What to do: Identify those sounds then learn to hear and produce them, then practice the new sounds on its own, then in words, then in phrases and finally in sentences and conversational speech. Your brain is more important than your tongue here and while your hearing may be perfect, the way you process or perceive the sounds has been set by the sounds system you grew up with. It takes time and effort, but new neural pathways can be formed.

Example: ``th`` does not appear in many languages and is difficult for speakers of those languages to say.

The rules for combining the sounds are different in the two languages

What to do: Identify the different rules, learn to hear them in everyday speech and practice the differences.

Example: In English we connect or ``link`` words. Not all languages do this. Say ``stop it`` out loud. What you are actually saying is ``staw-pit``. Not all languages do this.

Stress and intonation patterns are different in one language than in another

What to do: Identify the different patterns, learn to hear them in everyday speech and practice the differences.

Example: In English some words almost always get less stress (words such as ``the``, ``and``, ``of``, ``he`` and many others. English as a stress timed language. Not all languages are stress timed.

PRACTICE TIP

S-T-R-E-T-C-H Sounds to feel and hear how you are actually making those sounds

If you have trouble with a sound - Pull it apart - STRETCH IT

In everyday speech we speak too quickly to really be aware of how we are producing sounds. If you wish to change a sound or incorporate a new one - you will have to slow right down to become aware of it. This will feel artificial, but it will work.

- *Example:*

Imagine you have trouble with the ``th`` sound. Make the sound last 2-3 seconds to really feel what you are doing. Now slowly speed up to see if you can maintain the accuracy.