

<b>Headline</b>	Time for English speech to grow up		
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## Time for English speech to grow up

TODAY is the start of another Speak Good English campaign. Who's being helped and how?

Better speech includes phrasing, word choice, pronunciation, rhythm and intonation. The last two discomfort local tongues while the first two are easier to teach and learn.

But whatever happened to pronunciation? Each time pronunciation is broached I hear: 'It depends, are you speaking American or British?' I find British and American dictionaries concurring on pronunciation most of the time.

Onelook.com is a free multi-dictionary website. Some dictionaries on it have clickable audio pronunciation (American style). Other than being rhotic (rolling the 'r'), dulling the 't' ('wrider' for writer) and broadening the 'o' ('bux' for box), General American speech (newscasters' standard) pronounces mostly like standard Brit English.

Which are you more of? A cacoepist, heteroepist or an orthoepist? The first mispronounces, the second pronounces non-standardly and the last adheres to standards.

Pedantic to expect precise pronunciation? To me, cacoepy is like singing with 'pitch problems' or 'bum notes', a la American Idol judges' comments. There's a musicality to speech that heteroepy jars.

Hanyu pinyin standardises pronunciation as Mandarin mandates precise mimicry to inflect word change. Why shouldn't we reproduce English sounds as faithfully and diligently?

Heteroepy afflicts the high or low who are self-unaware. For instance, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan habitually pronounces 'air-fuht' (effort) as 'air-fort'. Even some of our ministers unknowingly say 'aw-PAW-chew-nee-tee' (opportunity) instead of 'AW-puh-chew-ni-ti'.

Here, we don't seem to teach or take the schwa (a short 'uh' sound that any vowel or combinations thereof can represent) seriously. It turns 'Sing-ah-pore' (Singapore) into 'Sing-uh-pore', 'mar-ke't' (market) into 'mar-kuht' and 'ab-doh-muhn' (abdomen) into 'ab-duh-muhn'.

We also tend to equalise syllabic stresses (longer sounds within a word) as in, 'bee-zee' (busy - long/long) instead of 'biz-EE' (short/long). Assorted common mispronunciations are 'air-buh-lawn' (abalone) instead of 'air-buh-loh-nee'; 'air-luh-vayt' (alleviate) instead of 'uh-lee-vee-ayt'; 'dee-zem-buh' (December) instead of 'dee-sem-buh'; 'dabt' (debt) instead of 'det'; 'kuh-leeg' (colleague) instead of 'kaw-leeg'; 'soo-ward' (sword) instead of 'sord'.

There's a tendency to voice (vibrate the vocal chord) unvoiced (non-vibrating) consonants like the 'c': 'pry-zing' (pricing) instead of 'pry-sing' or the 's' as in, 'prair-zhuh' (pressure) instead of 'prair-shuh'.

To improve pronunciation is simple. Take an interest in how differently native speakers pronounce. Never be smug. For instance, I didn't know 'aw-ree' (awry) was pronounced as 'uh-rye' until recently. Or that 'dee-sull-tuh-ree' (desultory) was 'dair-suhl-tree'.

Also, gently correct mispronunciations you hear. Doesn't repeated cacoepey lose you more 'face' than being corrected once?

**Anthony Lee Mui Yu**