

Tips for Native English Speakers

Speaking with Non-Native English Speakers

It's all in a name...Name pronunciation tips

1. *Ask for advice.* Don't let the anxiety of pronouncing names prevent you from talking with people or from calling them on the phone. When you are meeting someone, ask, "I would like to make sure I am pronouncing your name correctly, could you repeat your name for me please?" Then, follow-up and say, "_____, is that correct?"
2. *Recognize the difficulty you may face.* Understand that there are two things that make it difficult to pronounce names correctly:
 - a. Which syllable is stressed? (In U.S. English, it is typically on the second syllable, while many other languages stress the first syllable or have even stress on all syllables). With a bit of awareness, you may be more apt to stress the correct syllable for a colleague or client's name.
 - b. Some sounds are nearly impossible to replicate in a second language. You can try to imitate, but you may not be physically able to produce the correct sound. As a result, some non-native English speakers select a new name in order that they understand what you are saying and/or the name is easier for you to pronounce. Some may prefer this new name, while others may miss their real name.
3. *Ask for a preferred name.* Some non-native English speakers have been told that their names are hard to pronounce when in reality they are not. The name may simply have an unusual combination of letters and sounds and may just take a bit of practice. Asking someone "what name do you prefer I call you?" is a respectful question to ensure a preferred name is used.

Behaviors you can change

1. *Use limited repetition.* When you feel that you have not been understood, you, of course, will want to repeat yourself. When doing so, keep your words to a minimum, rather than adding detail and additional phrases to the story.
2. *Wait.* Speaking patterns vary widely across the world. To ensure that you are not inappropriately interrupting someone, watch how this person speaks in their native language to gain a sense of his or her natural speaking rhythms. If you get a sense that the speech pattern includes longer pauses between sentences, make sure you give the person time to finish before changing topics or asking additional questions.
3. *Avoid yes or no confirmation questions.* Ask, "Please tell me what you understood" instead of "do you understand?"
4. *Wait to be asked to fill in a missing word.* Some people love it when you give them the word you are searching for – and some people are quite offended. Also, some speakers will agree with your word, even if it does not quite capture the idea, just to agree or move the conversation forward. Therefore, you should error on the side of waiting to be invited to provide a word.

What to do when you don't know what to do...

Cultural Learning is a journey without end and a path filled with possibilities for amazing discoveries! There is no quick list that will guarantee intercultural competence, but there are identifiable strategies you can use to gain confidence, knowledge, and skills along the way. Here are some that we use regularly.

1. Recognize a strong emotional reaction (by you or those with whom you are interacting) is often an indicator that cultural differences may be involved. Take time to ask yourself:

- Is there a language comprehension difficulty?
- Is there a communication style difference involved?
- What key values might be involved?
- Am I over analyzing the situation and maybe just having a bad day?

2. Identifying how the above may be involved gives you information and guesses (or working hypothesis) to help you be open to alternative explanations (other than I am right and he or she is not!). Use the guesses to ask descriptive questions to cultural informants and depending on the relationships, the people involved in the conflict or confusion.

3. While it's commendable to want to avoid offending others, it's an unrealistic goal. Focus on relationships that matter and be open to learning from others and also in learning new ways to apologize. (For example, some U.S. Americans can apologize and be sincere and will include information that explains why the incident occurred. For some cultures, this does not look like an apology – looks like an excuse -- and is therefore not interpreted as sincere).

4. Understand that developing insightful understandings about your own and others' cultural backgrounds will sometimes lead you to new solutions and sometimes will lead you to be better informed and no closer to a mutually acceptable solution.

5. Give those you wish to understand a chance to speak. Facilitate conversations in such a manner that allows others to answer questions, to have time to prepare their thoughts, and to revisit the issues at a later time. You can do these things via relatively minor communication behaviors. If someone tries to interrupt someone else, ask the interrupter to "please wait a minute, I am not sure if Meriem was finished." To give someone a chance to think, state the question and then say you will ask again at the end of the conversation or email the question in advance. To revisit issues, demonstrate that you are open to feedback and hearing more about someone's ideas by stating "I am open to hearing more about your opinions you gave the other day on _____. Would you like to say more about _____?"

6. Change roles. If you are a talker, try more silence. If you are typically quiet, try talking and asking questions. Pretend you are a journalist and will need to go back to your office and write a story. Ask, "Could you please say more about _____?"

7. Test out your hypothesis with others. For example, you could state "I have heard that Minnesotans like to avoid conflict. Do you think this is true? In what situations?"

8. Be open to the idea that there is a viable alternative to everything you do (and potentially to ever thing you believe in).