

**Acquisition of Fluency in the English Language**

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**Abstract**

Though most nations are trying to prevent English from becoming the dominant language in their territory, it has become a global language for various reasons. To find a job somewhere in the world, it has become inevitable for everybody to learn at least the basics of the English language. This is particularly true in India, where multiple languages are spoken. In India, English is understood by most of the educated because they need help communicating in the regional languages of other states. Here English acts as a medium to convey their thoughts. In this paper, I would like to provide specific strategies that help non-native speakers of English gain fluency in English.

**Keywords:** Accuracy, English, Fluency, Language, Non-native speakers

In every state of India, most students prefer to study in English medium schools. Here, students are faced with a peculiar situation. Although their studies are done in English medium officially, teaching is done purely in the regional language. This is where the problem arises. They take their lessons in their regional language but write examinations in English. In due course, students may get accuracy in their writing rather than in speaking. Speaking skills are tested before writing skills when we go for an interview. When the candidate is unable to utter a single word in English, we do not have to expect anything positive.

Although many students are from English medium backgrounds, they need to communicate better in English because of certain misconceptions about acquiring fluency.

First, most non-native speakers assume that they should speak English accurately. Let's see how the words 'fluency' and 'accuracy' are defined. Fluency is the flow and efficiency with which you express your ideas, particularly when speaking. Accuracy is your ability to correctly use the necessary vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. This is particularly important for written assignments at university, such as essays and lab reports. It is also essential in the workplace, where mistakes may be viewed as unprofessional. As we see in the above definitions, committing some mistakes while speaking is okay, but it is unacceptable while writing.

The second misconception most non-native speakers of English have is that native speakers do not commit mistakes while talking in English. If we study how we mastered our mother tongue, we would understand that we, too, are so accurate that we never commit a mistake while talking in our mother tongue. Why does it happen so? Every child fumbles initially but gradually pick up accuracy in his talk. As we repeatedly speak the same, our mouth organs get trained, i.e., they are already tuned to utter almost all the sentences correctly. It may look odd if any grown-up speaks anything incorrectly in his mother tongue.

Third, many non-native speakers feel that they should by heart the meanings of all the words in a dictionary. Is it really possible for any human being to gain expertise in all the words by rote? The simple answer to this question could be a big 'NO' for obvious reasons. If we refer to the history of the British Isles, they were invaded several times by Romans, Germanic people, Vikings, Normans, French, and the Dutch. But things started changing for the United Kingdom from the late 16th century onwards, with England establishing trading posts overseas. By the mid-20th century, England ruled most parts of the world, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, Africa, etc. During all these centuries, English people borrowed words from other languages, and these words became part and parcel of the English language today. Now the sky is the only limit to the vocabulary of the English language. Anyhow, in 1930, providing a list of words, I.A. Richards stated that 850 words could be sufficient to speak fluently in English. This paragraph summarizes that we do not have to break our heads to know the meanings of all the words of the English language to speak fluently.

Fourth, many non-native speakers of English feel that they should live where English is spoken to acquire language skills. It's a good idea, but how many of us can afford to live in such a place? It's very expensive to go to the UK, the US, or any other country. So we need to create such an environment here. As a solution, it's better to be associated with people who can speak to you in English regularly.

Fifth, are we too old to learn a foreign language like English? A study tells us that children can learn seven or eight languages simultaneously. It is true because they feel open to expressing their ideas or views. If adults can get rid of such apprehensions, language learning cannot be an impossible task. In cities like Delhi or Hyderabad, there are many centers where people are trained in different languages such as French, German, Russian, Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, English, Arabic, Portuguese, Hindi, Italian, Korean, Indonesian, Polish, Thai, etc. English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad, offers many certificate courses in various languages for adults of any age. By taking up any system, one can quickly become bilingual or multilingual in a short period.

Sixth, most people think speaking some language fluently is a gift, like singing, painting, dancing, acting, etc. This is different from the acquisition of fluency in some languages. Anybody can become fluent, provided they try.

Seventh, one should take classes to learn a language. This notion is wrong. Let's think of how we acquired fluency in our mother tongue. We gain fluency in our mother tongue because of the environment we have around us. We find some rickshaw pullers, auto

drivers, cab drivers, etc., who talk fluently in English at tourist places. Even most educated men cannot speak like them. These people usually make friends with Indian or foreign tourists who communicate in English. In this process, they pick up the language. It is even necessary for them to learn English for their livelihood's sake. People who can speak more than one language can have better opportunities to earn more.

Eight, one misconception that most non-native speakers of English have is that native speakers of English speak too fast; hence, they should say fast. If we think so, we are mistaken because very few emit quickly; some talk slowly, and some speak at an average pace. This usually happens with speakers of any language in the world. We should completely ignore this kind of opinion about speaking fast in English. To learn facts, we can watch videos of native speakers of English on YouTube.

Ninth, it has become a fashion for most Indians to imitate the accent of native speakers of English. They claim that theirs is UK or US accent. This is the worst sort of claim because their pronunciation looks like something that is borrowed from somebody. One truth is that no non-native speaker can ever speak like a native speaker of English, even if he tries until his death. The same is the case when a native speaker of English tries to imitate the accent of a non-native speaker of some language. The only thing we can do in this regard is to improve the pronunciation of individual words in the English language.

Tenth, it has become a trend to say that one should read English newspapers to gain fluency in English. Newspaper reading may help us achieve accuracy but not fluency. In newspapers, we generally find lengthy and colourful expressions that can easily deceive enthusiasts of English. We must understand that the spoken form is entirely different from the written form of any language in the world. That is to say; we never speak as we write or write as we speak. So newspaper reading can never be suggested to acquire fluency in English. Instead, one can opt for reading short stories, mainly written for children, because they are presented with simplified versions in the English language.

So far, we have seen ten misconceptions that may hinder fluency. Now let's focus on strategies that work in favor of gaining fluency in the English language. These strategies are followed by almost everybody while speaking in their mother tongue. So we can apply the same approach to English too.

First, let's try to understand three conditions for the natural learning of a language. We can speak in our mother tongue fluently because we fulfill these three conditions.

1. Exposure
2. Interaction with others
3. Need to use the language for communication

If we take the first condition, it is the condition of being exposed to the language, which could be the mother tongue of everybody. In this stage, we generally listen to the language people speak around us. The second condition is critical because listening alone cannot get you anywhere, but we must also interact with others. The third condition tells us that we use language with a purpose. So exposure is equated with listening and interaction with speaking, our primary focus in this paper.

The natural order of acquiring language skills is Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (L S R W), which usually happens with the mother tongue of anybody in this world. But what is being done about acquiring language skills in the English language today? Large numbers of students are studying in English medium in all the states of India, but their acquisition of language skills in English is manifested only in reading and writing. They are acquiring language skills in English in the order of Writing, Reading, Speaking, and Listening, which are quite the opposite of the natural order of developing language skills in their mother tongue. Listening is hardly given any place in their daily routine. Here I am not talking about listening to English in the classrooms while teaching is done, but I am talking about listening to what takes place outside the classroom or at home. When listening does not happen, how can speaking be improved? Both listening and speaking are interdependent, for that matter. The more you hear, the better your communication can be. We can use several apps on our mobile phones to listen to English. I suggest listening to BBC World Service, in which native speakers of English read the news. It helps us pick up vocabulary naturally and will also allow us to improve our pronunciation of English words. Listening should take place in our daily life to enhance our ability to speak in English.

To our eyes, native speakers of English or people who can communicate well in English from other parts of the world seem to be speaking non-stop. Is it true that they talk without any breaks? Maybe. Here we need to spare some time for discussing how our brain works. We need to remember here that our brain is not any machine to supply sentences one after another while speaking to somebody. It takes at least one or two seconds to manufacture the following sentence. This is where the skill of fluent speakers is exhibited. These fluent speakers fill that gap of one or two seconds with fillers such as um, uh, er, ah, like, okay, right, alright, you know, well, I mean, etc. In a literal sense, these words or sounds do not have meaning. At the same time, some fluent speakers of English are aware of using them, and others are not. Knowingly or unknowingly, we use such fillers while communicating in our mother tongue but never realize that we are already using them. So let's start using gap fillers while speaking in English to give the impression of communicating without a break because we should not seem like a person who are thinking and talking.

Since non-native speakers have minor exposure to the English language in their daily routine, they should read short stories, novels, and plays of English literature as much as possible to acquire skills in that language. This habit of reading different genres of English literature strengthens their vocabulary and boosts their confidence to use various structures of sentences in their speech. Let me give you some examples of Indian intellectuals who excelled in English. These people needed formal training, yet they wrote many books in English. I can refer to some books written by them: Mahatma Gandhi's My Experiments with the Truth, Jawaharlal Nehru's The Discovery of India, APJ Abdul Kalam's Wings of Fire, Sarvepalli Radha Krishna's Indian Philosophy, P V Narasimha Rao's The Insider which is a novel. Though they wrote many books in their lives, I restricted myself to mentioning only one book by each due to space constraints.

Because of its limitations, our mind sometimes fails to deliver appropriate words while talking to others. Nobody is exempt from experiencing this situation. We cannot just stop our conversation with somebody so suddenly for being deprived of apt words. In this kind of situation, we can make use of alternative words which mean the same almost, for example, help for assistance, kill for murder, comfort for luxury, thankful for grateful, repay for compensation, etc.

If we visit any spoken English center, they only teach something like tense first. Still, they begin with auxiliary modal verbs, primarily used in the spoken form of the English language. A beginner of English language learning could be more comfortable with auxiliary modal verbs like a will, would, shall, should, can, could, may, might, must, dare, need, used to, ought to, etc., than a topic like tense which demands a lot of time for comprehension. So it's good to start with easier ones and move towards complex issues of English grammar.

We should never forget that the beauty of the English language lies in collocation which refers to how words go together or form fixed relationships. Though we say that some observation is synonymous with some other word, every word has meaning and must be used where it ought to be used. So anybody who wants perfection should try harder to master the collocations of the English language. Let me illustrate here with some examples: heavy rain but not heavy rain, high temperature but not elevated temperature, scenic view but not a panoramic picture, having an experience but not making an experience, blonde hair but not beige hair, discharged from hospital but not released from the hospital, etc.

The reason why we speak our mother tongue so fluently is due to oral practice. Mouth organs such as lips, cheeks, tongue, gums, teeth, hard and soft palates, uvula, tonsils, etc., play their part in speaking the mother tongue fluently. Since birth, they are trained so thoroughly that they always go right while uttering most expressions. Prof. K V Nair from Kochi, Kerala, India, in his course titled *Fluentzy*, recommends oral practice for acquiring fluency in English. In this course, he comes up with expressions ranging from a single word to lengthy sentences of all varieties. A learner must say those sentences aloud as many times as possible. This is the fastest way to acquire fluency in English.

In learning a foreign language, the mother tongue plays a pivotal role. Though we do not see equivalent expressions in the mother tongue, its role in acquiring language skills in English cannot be put aside. We need to use the mother tongue of learners to make them understand the tense of English grammar. Another thing is that the vocabulary of English can be made accessible through the mother tongue. At times, people may remember the meanings of words better when they are supplied with equivalent words in their mother tongue.

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