

Welcome to the In.Fluency Podcast. I'm Hadar, and this is episode number 4.

Hey everyone. Thank you for tuning in and I hope you're having a beautiful, beautiful day, morning, afternoon, evening. Whenever you're listening to this. And today we're going to talk about why we even need to improve our accent. Why does it matter? I want to tell you a little story.

When I first started giving accent lessons, that was back in, let me think, I think 2007, or 2008, I was doing something completely different. I was, actually, the general manager of a chef restaurant in Tel Aviv. And I was really busy, but I wasn't making enough money, and I wasn't happy with what I was doing. Because, I mean, it can get boring to just go to the same restaurant every single day. Even though the, the service was great, like interesting.

Different people, different conflicts. I would get yelled at by the chef. A lot of fun, but, but when I got back home, I would be like, I need something more in my life. So, I thought to myself, "Hey, I can actually start teaching accent and pronunciation. I've done it. I'm really good at it. I should just try". And I talk more about my story in episode number 2, so you can go back and listen to it if you want to hear the story in depth.

But basically, when I first started teaching accent, people would have a really strange reaction to this. And they would be like, "Why? Why do you need to improve your accent? This is not where you should focus on. What's wrong with having an accent. And this is just luxury. I mean, I struggle with my grammar."

Those I, I really had that response from, um, CEO of a big company, and they wanted me to come and teach there, but he was just like, "This is BS. I'm not going to, to allow this to happen in my company. This is ridiculous." He didn't say ridiculous. I think I added it. That's the story I'm telling myself, but he really didn't want me to go there and teach them how to speak with a different accent, or how to work on their American accent. And I can understand the resistance, and I understood that there is something wrong about how I talk about it. And, also, I think back then, the way I perceived it was, really, to sound more American. And now I have a different take on why we need to improve our accents. And this is exactly what I'm going to talk about today.

So, this, I think you're gonna really enjoy this episode. If you are a speaker of English as a second language that you feel that you don't sound, you're not happy with the way you sound, okay? You are unhappy. You have been working on improving your accent. Maybe you struggle with being understood, you know that there some clarity issues there. Maybe it's hard for you to understand native speakers, um, or maybe you're a teacher who's looking to teach pronunciation or accent, but you can't convince the people around you that this is also

important. So, this episode holds value for you too, so you should definitely stick around as well.

And, the first thing I want to tell you is that improving your accent has nothing to do with sounding American for the sake of sounding American. This is not your goal because there is nothing wrong about having a foreign accent. I think it's a huge privilege. I think it's a huge advantage. It shows that you are different. That means that you may bring something different to the table.

Um, it shows that you have more knowledge because you know another language, and you come from a different culture. And, honestly, people who may, who may have an opinion about you having an accent or prejudice around it, then, you know, these are people that you might want to think again, whether or not you want to be around them.

And yes, if these are people in a position of power where you feel like, you know, just like managers or clients or, I know that there is a struggle and this is exactly why I, uh, I do think that you need to be in control of your pronunciation. But it doesn't mean that you need to lose your identity.

This is why I am not a fan of the slogan "speak like a native". Because, first of all, it means that the way you are now is not enough. And I'm here to tell you that you are enough. No matter how many mistakes you make or no matter how strong your accent is or your voice. How different your voice is. You are enough and you don't need to sound like anyone else. Now, you can say, "Okay, I want to speak like a native. So, I feel as confident in English as I do in my native tongue." And then I say, "Okay, I get that. And I wish nothing more than that for you. But, you know, I can tell you that there is nothing like your native language, the language that you are born into.

And once you reconcile with the gap I have, by the way. English will never be or will never feel the same as Hebrew feels, right? And I'm okay with that. And by just like not setting up this high expectation that it needs to feel like Hebrew, or it needs to feel like my first language allowed me to really grow, and let go, and feel confident the way I am with my mistakes.

So, this is why I feel that the speak like a native slogan. Is just doing more harm than than it advances you. Because it's not about you, it's about them. It's about sounding like them. I'm going to talk more about that on another episode, but for now, just I'm going to leave you with that thought.

Having said that, if you don't know me, then I have started as an accent coach. I still still, this is mainly what I do. My signature program is called "Accent Makeover" and it's all about how

to improve your pronunciation. But more than sounding American, it's about how to be clear and confident in English.

So, the reason why I still think it's really important, and I still think that it needs to be taught in schools as part of the curriculum – it has to be an integral part of teaching English as a second language – is because an accent is the door to understanding spoken English and mastering spoken English. It is the secret of speaking with confidence and communicating clearly. So, let's dive deep into all of those reasons.

The first reason is confidence. When you feel understood or, you know what, I'm going to go even deeper. When you speak a language, there is the way the language sounds in your head, how you know the word should sound, or a certain sound should sound, the quality of it. You know how it sounds because you're exposed to the language, in our case, English. So, you're so exposed to English. You know how it should sound.

But something along the way, as you say that word or make that sound, changes. And, all of a sudden, what comes out of your mouth doesn't sound like the way it sounds in your head. And that creates lack of confidence. That creates like, first of all, it throws you off.

You feel like, Oh, there's something wrong here. So, when you're speaking, and that happens, and you become self-conscious about your pronunciation because you know that what you're saying shouldn't come out that way and you don't know what to do about it. Well, first of all, it throws you off, and then it distracts you, and that can cause like, other mistakes, or you'll stop speaking, or you'll get stuck.

So, we don't want that. But then you feel like you're incapable, or there is something wrong with you. You become insecure about your pronunciation because you are not in control. Everything feels ambiguous and vague, and that's not a good place to be in. When you speak a second language, you want to be in control, and when that happens, you are out of control, right? Like you don't have the control of the speaking part.

So, when you work on pronunciation, when you know how to articulate sounds, when you know how to make whatever sounds in your head – how to, how to say or how to execute whatever sound you have in your head, or a word. When you learn how to do that, you feel in control.

And even if you still make mistakes, because it's one thing to learn how to make that sound, it's another thing to incorporate it spontaneously in your day-to-day speech. But the first part, like knowing what needs to be done is huge. And when you're there, when you know that, then you're, you feel a lot more empowered. So, if someone doesn't understand you, you know what exactly you need to change in order for you to be clear.

So, mastering the pronunciation of a language, if that language is your second language, is crucial for building up your confidence. Also, it provides you with clarity. That's the second reason why pronunciation matters. Why working on your accent is really important? If you want to become fluent and if you want to become a confident speaker. And it's not just clarity in terms of, "okay, you're clear, people understand you". But it's clarity in terms of "you know, what you need to do". Right?

I think it also relates to what I've said in the previous, um, reason, but it's really about, you know, it's all more organized in your head. Nothing blends in. You don't, kind of like, confuse pronunciation with spelling. You have a better understanding of how to control the sounds. You have a better understanding of how to control your articulation organs. So, you, you have clarity and when you have clarity, you have confidence.

But, of course, it also has to do with clarity. Your clarity, like being clear. Because if you're not clear, if people are not going to understand you, then we have a problem, Houston. Houston, we have a problem. Because, you know, the first time you say something to a native speaker or a non-native speaker, um, and they listened to you, they'd be like, "Excuse me, what was that?"

Or they'll just make this movement with their head, and you'll understand and repeat it. And then you repeat it the second time, and then they'll, maybe, ask you again, "I'm sorry?". But then if you say it again, and they don't understand you, they, they won't put you on the spot. They won't ask you to repeat yourself the third time. And then, your message is compromised. What you want to say, what you want to get from them, right?

If you want to get something from another speaker – whether it's a native speaker or a non-native speaker, it doesn't matter – um, then you want to be clear. And sometimes something that you're doing with your mouth or your voice, or how you change the pronunciation of sounds because this is how you're used to it.

This is how you're used to speaking. There's nothing wrong with that, right? It's, it's how you see how you were born, you know? Well, not really born, but you were you grew up speaking a certain way and now you need to do it completely differently. Okay, think about this. Think about like, okay, up until now you've been walking on your feet, or on your legs actually. And let's say starting from tomorrow, you start, you have to start walking on your hands.

Now, it's not impossible. I have met people who know how to do that. I have no interest in doing that myself, but people do do it. So, imagine like all of a sudden someone would be like, "Okay, start walking like this, okay? Thank you." You're like, "How the heck am I supposed to do that?"

So, what would you do? You'd feel horrible at the beginning, and maybe have a slight headache and an anxiety attack. But you'll start working at it, and you'll build your muscles, and you'll forgive yourself for falling. Because you were never used to walking like this, but you'll, you would probably be pretty patient with yourself because it's a ridiculous demand. Now, asking you to speak a different language with the right pronunciation is also, technically, a ridiculous demand. Because you need to use muscles that you've never used before, and you need to place your voice differently, and open your mouth in a way that you've never experienced before. So it's, what I'm trying to say is that it takes practice. And it takes some muscle building, and it takes some grace.

That you need to be graceful with yourself and tell yourself, "Hey, it's not easy the first time. I just need to do it because I need to be clear. Because if I need to fit in in, in that language, I need to use those elements." It's like if you are walking into a land when everyone walks on their hands, and that's it. Like, if you walk on your legs, you are an outcast. I mean, it's not the best analogy, now, that I come to think about it. But I think you get the point.

Anyway. Speaking English as a second language or using the pronunciation of English properly can be demanding, not impossible. But, going back to clarity, using the right pronunciation will make you sound more clear. And it's not about making them feel comfortable about your accent. It's about you getting what you want. I've said that, and I'm going to say that many more times in this episode. Okay?

So, it's about you getting what you want and for that they need to understand you. And using the vowels and consonants and rhythm of your native tongue may make you sound unclear. Because that that's not what they're expecting to hear. Okay?

When you listen to someone speak, there's so much that goes into it, and it's all about expectations. Like paradigms of speech that people are used to, and that that's what they look for. And if that doesn't happen, then they're confused. And if, you know, they speak to you for the first time, they may not understand you. Not because you're doing something wrong, but because you're doing something different. Okay?

So, understanding American pronunciation and using it – I always say that, you know, learning a new accent is like buying a costume that you can put on and take off whenever you want – it serves you. And you should use it when you need to, when you need to get something. Right? Like on the phone or with new people. This is, probably, when you want to be a bit more aware of your pronunciation. So, clarity, for sure.

Using the right, uh, the American accent. I don't want to say the right accent I almost said that, but I caught myself. It's not the right accent cause there is no right accent. General

American is not the right accent. It's an accent. And that is more clear than others. It's probably clearer than a Scottish accent to American speakers and international speakers, I would say. But a Scottish accent is the right accent in Scotland. So, it's really, it's, it really depends on your perspective.

Okay. So, the next reason why, speaking with an accent, or with a proper pronunciation of English and using the intonation of English is important is because it creates rapport.

Rapport, and I'm going to read now from the dictionary, rapport is a close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas, and communicate well.

So, it's this internal connection, nonverbal connection that is created in a conversation. And it creates, creates trust and sympathy. And, of course, when we communicate, this is the, the emotion that we want to generate. We want to have rapport in a conversation. And speaking in the same accent, using the same intonation and, definitely, using the same rhythm creates rapport.

So, as I said - going back to the costume analogy - when you speak to someone and you know how to use their rhythm, their intonation, if you're in front of them, even their body language, and the way they use their hands, these things create rapport.

So, having an understanding of what is the American intonation - let's say you're, you want to speak with an American accent, or you're speaking with American speakers - then understanding what are the things that they're doing to communicate, what is their rhythm, and using that as a way to achieve rapport and use that in your communication helps you as a speaker.

Okay. So, we talked about confidence. We talked about clarity, we talked about rapport. And now let's talk about impact.

Well, as human beings, we want to be able to influence people. And we influence people, usually, with our language, ideally. You don't want to influence people by just, like, pushing them around the room, right?

So, we want to influence them with our words. This is why this podcast is called "In.Fluency". Because you influence people when you're fluent in the language. Anyway, so, you want to impact people. How do we do that? What makes a person influence others? What makes a great leader great? How do they communicate?

It's really interesting to explore great speakers or listen to great speakers and try to analyze the way they speak. What makes it so engaging, and communicative, and clear? So, of course, it has to do with a message and the choice of words, but it's not just that. Like, you

can have a boring as speaker speaking, like the most incredible, um, words, or ideas, or philosophy. But it's just like you just want to go to sleep.

So, it's not enough to have a good message. You really have to know how to deliver it. And, when you use the language properly, you start having impact. When you know what words stress, when you know how to build suspense, and to anticipate, to create anticipation. When people are, like, eager for your main point, even if it's not that important, when, how you break it down.

So, it's simple and clear for them to understand, and they don't have to work too hard to try to make sense of what you've just said. Okay? So, if you want to have impact, if you want to engage people, then owning a certain accent, the accent of English, the proper accent of English – I teach general American, but of course, general British is also okay, received pronunciation, whatever works for you. But once you choose a certain accent that is clear and clean and vastly used, then, of course, you can have you can start understanding how you can have more impact when speaking English and how to engage people more.

Also, the next reason is it gives you a sense of empowerment. Because it's not just about speaking with a better accent, it's knowing that you had an obstacle, but you've overcome it. It's knowing that something that was unattainable to you is, all of a sudden, clear, and, possible, and feasible. Once you start breaking it down, it makes it possible, and when you start seeing improvement, it helps you in your communication. It builds up your confidence, we talked about that. And it starts improving other aspects in English that you've never even thought about before.

But it also helps you personally, like knowing that you have mastered something that before you thought it's not even possible. So, it gives you a sense of empowerment, and it's always good to have that. Because I feel that, okay, so you know grammar, and then you learn another grammar rule. That's just something that you've done and you get better at it. But if pronunciation has been a challenge, and you've thought in the past that this is not possible for you, or no one can change their accent, and all of a sudden you see that it's possible, I mean, that's huge. And I think that as a teacher of English, it's really important to show your students that it is possible that there aren't any aspects in English that are unattainable for them.

The last reason why improving your accent is essential for improving your English and your fluency is because understanding the accent of English, or pronunciation proper pronunciation of English is essential for comprehension, for understanding speakers. The first reason is because when you break down a language in your head by breaking down, breaking

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it down into sounds and units and words, and you understand intonation, it's a lot like you detected better whatever is being spoken to you.

But also, you know, people reduce a lot of words. Um, there are a lot of reductions, like how they they stress words. It's not something that you'll learn from a textbook. And because English and pronunciation do not correspond, a lot of times because English learner learners begin learning English through reading and writing, then they expect to hear English as it's written. And when it clashes, then there is a problem.

Like you feel like there's something wrong with you because you don't understand what they're saying. But it's not that you don't understand what they're saying. You're looking for different words. You're looking for the words that you know, the way they're written.

So, we need to change that. And by understanding the pronunciation of the language and intonation, you are able to understand better what people are saying to you. Also, it really helps you understand different accents, whether it's an American accent, a regional accent, like a Southern or, um, a Scottish accent.

When you understand the sounds of the language, it's a lot easier for you to understand those accents because you understand the substitutions really quickly, and it's easier for you to make sense of it. So, learning improving your accent in English helps you understand English speakers better, or American speakers – native speakers, native speakers, native speakers – better. Okay?

So, I think these are good enough reasons, right? To, to improve your accent, to pursue accent training. So, the next time someone makes fun of you for improving your accent, you can be like, "Well, I'll tell you why you need to improve your accent," and list all those things that we talked about.

This is also a good opportunity to tell you that I have. A gazillion lessons and videos for you, totally free, on my website that you can just go and start learning, and improving on your own. It's called the Accent's Way Magazine, and it's on my website. I'm going to post a link to it in the description, so you can go ahead and check it out right after.

Also, if you want to learn more about my signature program – Accent Makeover, that I run twice a year – you can also click to join the wait list in the show notes.

Okay, that's it. I would love to hear what you think about this. So, feel free to comment over to my Instagram account – @hadar.accentway, and send me a DM and tell me what you thought about this episode, and tell me if you agree with me. Or, maybe you think it's all nonsense. I'd love to hear that, too.

So, don't be shy coming over and say hi, and that was a nice ride. I should've been a poet,

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now that I think about it.

Anyway, thank you for tuning in. And I'll see you next time. Bye.