

## YES, YOU CAN UNDERSTAND NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS!

In this lesson, we will shed light on the difficulties English learners face when listening to native speakers. By exploring the underlying reasons behind these challenges, you will receive practical tips to enhance your comprehension skills and bridge the communication gap so you can have clearer, more confident interactions.

### **1 Spoken English is Different from Textbook/School English**

The first point you need to understand is that spoken English is often different from the English you learn in school, which we'll refer to as 'textbook English'. Now, this isn't always true, of course, but I am talking about casual, everyday English you'd use in your daily conversations.

When I speak in my YouTube videos, I speak at a slower pace, I carefully choose my words, and I make sure my register is suitable for English learners. I want you to be able to understand each word I say, but most native speakers you meet on the street will not have this same mindset.

Here are some examples of how spoken English and textbook English might differ from a grammar standpoint.

There are certain tenses and grammatical structures that are far more commonly used in written English than they are in spoken English, like —

- **Passive Voice**

The **passive voice** is a grammatical construction used to emphasise the action or object rather than the subject or doer. It is often preferred in academic writing, formal reports and professional documents.

Example:

*The decision was made by the committee.*



- **Prepositions at the end of a sentence**

You may have been taught that you shouldn't end sentences with **prepositions**; well, I'm here to tell you that native speakers do it all time.

It might be confusing to hear a random preposition at the end of a sentence, but trust me, it is very common, like in these examples:

*Who are you going **with**?*

It honestly sounds way too proper to say:

***With** whom are you going?*

*She didn't know who to give the gift **to**.*

Rather than the textbook English version:

*She didn't know **to whom** to give the gift.*

- **Bending the grammatical rules**

I also want to point out that we tend to bend other rules a bit when speaking; for example, you might hear someone say:

*"I haven't **got** any money."* Which is common in spoken British English.

While in school, you're most likely taught to say, *"I don't **have** any money."*

Another example of this is in the expression:

*"Can't believe it!"* where we drop the subject and utilise the contraction of 'cannot'.

You're obviously taught in school always to include a subject, like *"**I cannot believe it!**"* but that doesn't always happen in conversation.



## 2 Get Feedback from Trained, Qualified Professionals

If you're serious about truly mastering English, there really is no better way than one-on-one sessions with a **qualified professional**.

Trying to progress without feedback is really bloody hard. There's no better place to do this than **LinguaTalk**, which is a company that I think is so awesome, I decided to become a part of it.

**LinguaTalk** is an online language tutor platform with incredibly high-quality teachers across all languages. They only accept around 10% of applicants, but for English, it's much lower—their standards are that high!

I'm currently using it to learn Italian. My husband, Will, is using it to learn Spanish, and you can join us and learn English there; the teachers are top-notch. Now, a little incentive, I will give you **\$10 in lesson credit** if you sign up to take your first lesson after watching this video. So as well as being able to log in and look through all the teacher's profile videos and book a 30-minute trial lesson **for free**, you can also claim \$10 toward lessons by messaging their support team with the code **EWL10**. This is valid for anyone signing up from today onwards.

## 3 Native Speakers Don't Articulate: Connected Speech

One of the things I'm sure you will pick up on while listening to British content or in conversations with your LinguaTalk tutor and native English-speaking friends is that we love to squish our words together and get information out as quickly and efficiently as possible.

This is known as **connected speech**, which refers to the way words are linked together in natural, fluent speech. There are several key aspects of connected speech you need to be aware of. I am not going to go too deep into this right now, but I want you to be aware of certain features you will definitely hear in spoken British English:



- Elision

**Elision** is the omission, or leaving out, of certain sounds in speech, often to make pronunciation more efficient and fluid. In British English, the most common example is the dropping of the final /t/ sound in words like 'not', 'but', and 'what'.

For example—

*I don't know* may be pronounced as *I don' know*.

- Assimilation

**Assimilation** occurs when a sound changes to become more like a neighbouring sound. In British English, this often happens with the /t/ and /d/ sounds when followed by a /j/ sound.

- /t/ + /j/ often sounds like /tʃ/ = got you → go-chew
- /d/ + /j/ often sounds like /dʒ/ = would you → woo-jew

- Intrusive 'r'

In British English, an /r/ sound is sometimes inserted between two vowel sounds to make the transition smoother. This is particularly common in non-rhotic accents, such as Received Pronunciation (RP).

For example—

**law and order** may be pronounced as **law-r-and order**

- Linking 'r'

Similar to the *intrusive* /r/, the **linking** /r/ occurs when a word ending in 'r' is followed by a word beginning with a vowel sound. In non-rhotic accents, the 'r' is pronounced to connect the two words.

For example—

**far away** may be pronounced as **fa-raway**



- Weak forms

In connected speech, certain words are often pronounced with a reduced or **weak form**. This is particularly common with function words, such as prepositions, articles and auxiliary verbs.

For example—

**to** may be pronounced as /tə/ and **and** as /ən/.

## 4 Contractions and Unique Language Features

Next, we need to talk about **contractions**. I feel like contractions go hand-in-hand with connected speech. Contractions, as I've talked about in a previous video, refer to the shortening of words by combining two or more words together. This process involves omitting certain letters and replacing them with an apostrophe (').

In spoken English, native speakers pretty much always use contractions. For example:

We don't say: I **am** from England.

We say: **I'm** from England.

Uncontracted	Contracted	Pronunciation
I am	I'm	/aɪm/
He is	He's	/hi:z/ /his/ /ɪz/
She is	She's	/ʃi:z/ /ʃɪz/

You are	You're	/jʊə(r)/ /jɔ:(r)/
We are	We're	/wɪə(r)/
They are	They're	/ðeə(r)/
She has	She's	/ʃi:z/ /fɪz/
He has	He's	/hi:z/ /hɪs/
It has	It's	/ɪts/
I have	I've	/aɪv/
You have	You've	/ju:v/
We have	We've	/wi:v/ /wɪv/
I had	I'd	/aɪd/
You had	You'd	/ju:d/
She had	She'd	/ʃi:d/
He had	He'd	/hi:d/
We had	We'd	/wi:d/ /wɪd/
They had	They'd	/ðeɪd/
I would	I'd	/aɪd/
You would	You'd	/ju:d/



He would	He'd	/hi:d/
She would	She'd	/ʃi:d/
It would	It'd	/'itəd/
We would	We'd	/wi:d/ /wid/
They would	They'd	/ðeɪd/
I will	I'll	/aɪl/
You will	You'll	/ju:l/
He will	He'll	/hi:l/
She will	She'll	/ʃi:l/
It will	It'll	/'ɪtl/
We will	We'll	/wi:l/ /wɪl/
They will	They'll	/ðeɪl/

## Informal Contractions

Now, contractions aren't usually used in formal writing, and they are more commonly used in spoken English. But native speakers like to take it a step further. We also use **informal contractions**, which combine two or more words into shorter words, but they are quite informal and used in very casual conversations, like in this sentence —



I **hafta** go to the shops if you **wanna** come.

Rather than:

I **have to** go to the shops if you **want to** come.

These kinds of informal contractions are extremely popular and tend to cause a lot of confusion for English learners, so the more familiar you become with them, the quicker your listening skills will improve. Here are some very common informal contractions:

- used to = **usta**
- kind of = **kinda**
- lots of = **lotsa**
- could have = **coulda**
- I would have = **Ida**
- she would have = **sheeda**
- how + did/ do + you = **how'dja**
- what + did / do + you = **what'dja**

## 5 Idioms and Slang

Finally, we need to talk about **slang and idioms**. As English learners, I am sure you were taught to speak in a very direct form of English to say exactly what you mean, but, unfortunately, native speakers don't often speak in such a way.

We tend to use a lot of slang and idioms because it adds colour and character to what we are trying to say. I'm sure you do the same in your native language.

Slang and idioms are often used to express ideas or emotions in a more creative and nuanced way than standard, direct English, but this also tends to make it challenging for English learners to understand. So, here are some common slang terms that you will most likely encounter in daily conversation.





- **grub**: food, particularly pub food.
- **lurgy**: an unspecified mild illness or feeling unwell
- **dab hand**: skilled or proficient at something
- **fit**: attractive, in addition to being physically fit
- **merry or tipsy**: slightly drunk, while "**wasted**" or "**pissed**" signifies being heavily intoxicated
- **knackered**: extremely tired
- **chuffed**: very happy or pleased
- **gutted**: feeling disappointed or upset
- **ear bashing**: angry criticism or scolding
- **hacked off**: annoyed or angry
- **rank**: having a disgusting taste or smell
- **dodgy**: something or someone suspicious, dishonest or potentially dangerous
- **naff**: something unsophisticated or tacky
- **skint**: having no money
- **minted or loaded**: very rich
- **faffing around** or **fannyng around**: wasting time or being indecisive
- **taking the piss (two meanings)**: mocking someone or something and doing or saying something unreasonable

Additionally, here are some fun idioms for you to get started:

- **every cloud has a silver lining**: encourages finding something positive in a difficult or challenging situation
- **blessing in disguise**: something that initially seems unfortunate but turns out to be beneficial
- **spill the beans**: revealing a secret or sharing confidential information
- **under the weather**: feeling unwell or being in a slightly ill or low-energy state
- **to cost an arm and a leg**: to refer to something being very expensive or costly
- **jump on the bandwagon**: join or adopt a popular trend or follow something that is currently fashionable or widely accepted



## QUIZ!

**Choose the correct answer for each question.**

- 1) What is the main difference between spoken English and textbook English?
  - a. spoken English is always formal
  - b. textbook English is more casual
  - c. spoken English is often more casual and less structured
- 2) What is connected speech?
  - a. a formal way of speaking
  - b. the way words are linked together
  - c. a type of slang
- 3) What is elision?
  - a. the addition of sounds in speech
  - b. the omission of certain sounds in speech
  - c. the repetition of sounds in speech
- 4) What is an example of assimilation in British English?
  - a. "could you" pronounced as "coo-jew"
  - b. "law and order" pronounced as "law-r-and order"
  - c. "far away" pronounced as "fa-raway"
- 5) Which of the following is an example of an informal contraction?
  - a. I'm sure he'll call you any minute now.
  - b. I hafta pick up milk on the way home.
  - c. I am new to the area.
- 6) I was \_\_\_\_\_ after paying my bills, so I had to wear a \_\_\_\_\_ outfit to the event, but I still managed to have a good time.
  - a. mint; shredded
  - b. skint; naff
  - c. dodgy; minted
- 7) What does the idiom 'every cloud has a silver lining' mean?
  - a. there is always something positive in a difficult situation
  - b. clouds are always beautiful
  - c. silver is valuable
- 8) I've been feeling \_\_\_\_\_ lately, so I decided to take a day off and rest at home.
  - a. under the blue
  - b. under the weather
  - c. blue and sick

The End!

1) 2) 3) 4) 5) 6) 7) 8) 9) 10) 11) 12) 13) 14) 15) 16) 17) 18) 19) 20)

