

第二届全国青年创新翻译大赛

D 组——英译中【原文】

Does Accent Matter?

Learning to speak a new language? Just use it!

The main reason for this is something called foreign language anxiety, more formally known as xenoglossophobia. This is the feeling of unease or inadequacy you might get when speaking a foreign language.

Foreign language anxiety stems from the perception that we will be judged for not communicating with as much ease or precision as we would in our native language.

It is a concept that may be perpetuated by teachers, family members, and the general public alike.

As a result, this may form the idea that it is necessary to strive for a “perfected” accent, which can inevitably vary depending on the geographic location where a particular language is spoken.

At times, this may produce an uncomfortable method or rhythm of speech for the interlocutor, further enhancing the anxiety and lowering the motivation to speak.

It is important to note that anyone can suffer from this perceived linguistic inadequacy, including native speakers. But the phenomenon is far more common to second-language speakers who haven't achieved a high degree of conversational comfort.

This is, however, an idea that we should evaluate further and truthfully pick apart.

Everyone has an accent, whether it is considered “authentic” based on geographic location or not. The most important aspect of learning a new language — and

subsequently speaking it — is simply being able to communicate.

The more we focus on speaking like someone we're not, possibly as a result of external pressure or by our own idea of proper speech in our target language, the more difficult the language-learning process will become.

Languages are living concepts, and no one can speak any language “perfectly.” The idea of oral-language perfection is a myth. The more we strive for this idea of perfection, the more frustrating the process becomes.

We learned our “mother tongue” by simply watching and imitating others speaking the language, without structure and making mistakes, but eventually the pieces fell into place. So, when it comes to oral reproduction of a second language, the same idea should be implemented: Just speak it.

Being able to communicate the message to the listener is key. One’s accent or grammar structure comes with time and can be improved with close care, but neither will improve without using the language as much as possible.

This is also true with code-switching, which can often produce negative emotions for the interlocutor when trying to speak in the target language.

However, this is a concept that can occur naturally for people who speak multiple languages, especially if more than one of these languages come from similar language families, such as Italian and Spanish.

Ultimately, this should not discourage us from pursuing conversations in our target language, as with time, the frequency of code switching tends to decrease.

Each individual must decide for themselves what language perfection sounds like. Ultimately, enjoying the process is key to achieving that comfort — it’s the true way to learn and flourish within a target language.

When given an opportunity to speak in a language we are learning, whether with a “native” or not, it is fundamental to simply use it. That way we can build upon our

fluidity, vocabulary, and linguistic grasp. It allows our mouths to get used to moving in ways that reflect accurate pronunciation of these new words.

An interesting language-hack, or rule of thumb, is that if the mouth hurts after speaking in this new language, that is a good sign of oral development.

We ought to put our egos aside and use what we already know when developing our ability to speak another language, so we can build upon our knowledge and achieve the language goals that we set out for ourselves.