

Speaking To Yourself Can Be Dangerous! (The Importance Of Speaking Practice For ESL Learners)

By: Josef Essberger There are 4 key skills when you learn a language:

- * listening
- * speaking
- * reading
- * writing

Which one of these is the 'Odd-Man-Out'? Which one of these is different from the other three? The answer is speaking. The other three you can do alone, on your own, without anyone else. You can listen to the radio alone. You can read a book alone. You can write a letter alone. But you can't really speak alone! Speaking to yourself can be 'dangerous' because men in white coats may come and take you away!!!

That is why you should make every effort possible to find somebody to speak with. Where can you find people who can speak English with you? And how can you practise speaking when you are alone?

At School

If you go to a language school, you should use the opportunity to speak to your teachers and other students. When you go home, you can still practise listening, reading and writing, but you probably can't practise speaking. If your teacher asks you a question, take the opportunity to answer. Try to say as much as possible. If your teacher asks you to speak in pairs or groups with other students, try to say as much as possible. Don't worry about your mistakes. Just speak!

Conversation Clubs

Many cities around the world have conversation clubs where people can exchange one language for another. Look in your local newspaper to find a conversation club near you. They are usually free although some may charge a small entrance fee.

Shopping

If you are living in an English-speaking country, you have a wonderful opportunity. Practise speaking to the local people such as shop assistants or taxi drivers. Even if you don't want to buy anything, you can ask questions about products that interest you in a shop. 'How much does this cost?' 'Can I pay by cheque?' 'Which do you recommend?' Often you can start a real conversation - and it costs you nothing!

Anglo-Saxon Pubs and Bars

Even if you don't live in an English-speaking country, there are often American, British, Irish and Australian pubs in many large cities. If you can find one of these pubs, you'll probably meet many people speaking English as a first or second language.

Language is all around You

Everywhere you go you find language. Shop names, street names, advertisements, notices on buses and trains... Even if you are not in an English-speaking country, there are often a lot of English words you can see when walking in the street, especially in big cities. And there are always numbers. Car numbers, telephone numbers, house numbers... How can this help you? When you walk down the street, practise reading the words and numbers that you see. Say them to yourself. It's not exactly a conversation, but it will help you to 'think' in English. For example, if you walk along a line of parked cars, say the number on each car quickly as you pass it. Test yourself, to see how fast you can walk and still say each number. But don't speak too loud!

Songs and Video

Listen to the words of an English-language song that you like. Then repeat them to yourself and try to sing with the music. Repeat the words as many times as possible until they become automatic. Soon you'll be singing the whole song. Or listen to one of your favourite actors on video and repeat one or two sentences that you like. Do it until it becomes automatic. It's good practice for your memory and for the mouth muscles that you need for English.

Above all, don't be afraid to speak. You must try to speak, even if you make mistakes. You cannot learn without mistakes. There is a saying: "The person who never made a mistake never made anything." So think of your mistakes as something positive and useful.

Speak as much as possible! Make as many mistakes as possible! When you know that you have made a mistake, you know that you have made Progress!

About the Author

Josef Essberger formerly taught English as a foreign language in Asia and Europe. He is founder of <http://EnglishClub.com>, a site for ESL learners and teachers, and <http://TEFL.net>, a site dedicated to ESL teachers. Looking for ESL resources? Learn more at <http://www.englishclub.com/>.

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