

## The "Native Speaker" Myth

There are a number of popular myths about learning to speak English as a foreign language (EFL). Many learners take them for granted<sup>2</sup> in spite of clear evidence that suggests otherwise. Here we will examine some of them in the hope of clearing up any misunderstandings.

One of the widely held beliefs is that native speakers make the best conversation partners. This is not true. Illogical as it may seem, researchers are telling us that native speakers are not necessarily the best partners for language learners to talk with. Native speakers often dominate a conversation, leaving a learner little opportunity to practice. And lost and confused, the learner tends to keep silent in an effort to be polite and not show ignorance.

Another preoccupation<sup>3</sup> is the desire to speak like a native. Many EFL learners believe they should learn "the standard English" in order to acquire pronunciation "without an accent." This is an unrealistic goal for most learners to aim for. The fact is, native speakers don't all speak the same variety of English, and there is no such thing as a standard version of English. And even if there is, it is almost impossible for learners, once they pass a certain age, to get rid of the accent of their mother tongue. All things considered, there is really no good reason to "sound like a native."

Most students also think that if they go to an English-speaking country, they will pick up the language without much effort. What they don't know is that plenty of learners acquire a foreign language without leaving their home country. And by the same token<sup>4</sup>, the reverse<sup>5</sup> is often true: some learners never progress beyond a certain level of proficiency despite years of exposure.<sup>6</sup> While there are advantages to living in a country where the target language is spoken, natural immersion<sup>7</sup> alone does not guarantee success. Simply put, the keys to success in learning a language are still the good old-fashioned time and effort.

1. myth (n): a popular belief: 迷思。2. take for granted: to consider as true or real: 視為理所當然。3. preoccupation (n): the state of being preoccupied; absorption of the attention or intellect: 過度專注於某事。4. by the same token: in like manner; similarly: 同樣的道理。5. reverse (adj): opposite: 相反的。6. exposure (n): introduction to, intense contact with: 密集接觸。7. immersion (n): complete involvement: 完全融入。

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