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Female Voice: You are now listening to the IELTS Podcast. Learn from tutors and ex-examiners who are masters of IELTS preparation. Your host, Ben Worthington.

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Ben: Hello there, IELTS students. In this tutorial, we are talking with Esther Bruhl and she's going to give us a full rundown on nine steps on how to neutralize your accent for the IELTS Speaking test. So, hi there, Esther. How are you doing today?

Esther: Great. Hi Ben. Great to be with you.

Ben: Yes. It's awesome to have a speech therapist, a real professional in the field on the podcast to help us today, to help students improve their scores. So, Esther, could you tell us a bit about yourself how you got into this and your company and how you help students, please?



Esther: Yeah, sure. I'm actually based in Australia and I'm a speech and language therapist working with children and adults helping them speak more clearly and at some point because like most countries in the world, we-- well, Australia was founded on immigrants. There are lots and lots of people who are here who need to get jobs or need to get work and they have really great skills, but their speech isn't as clear as it needs to be especially if it's a job on the phone or they have to present things or talk with their colleagues, etc.

And so I started off by running groups for people who wanted to come because they were having trouble being understood and I ran a few groups and then more and more people wanted my services. And so in the end, I thought well, I'll make a course you know. And so we made an original course which was a small course with audio mainly and since then, we've upgraded to much better courses that are online and lots of training videos and lots of audios, etc. And people



are finding-- and I also do work with people online all over the world if they want private coaching as well to just speed up their progress.

Ben: Interesting.

Esther: So, yeah. And I've worked with people who wanted to improve their score in the IELTS Speaking test as well because not only as you know it's about how you organize what you say but it's also being clear enough to get that higher score. Yeah. And sometimes people don't even know how to move their mouth differently to make that difference, so that's where I come in.

Ben: Could you tell us more? So, just to summarize, you started off doing these groups and then because they were really popular that kind of progressed into doing private coaching online for helping students with not only their accent but speaking more clearly and all the other aspects of speaking and also an online course, right?



Esther: Yes. Yeah. We actually have several courses. You can either neutralize your accent, speak more clearly, or get a full-on standard British, standard American, or standard Australian accent with our courses, so whichever you choose. Yeah.

Ben: Wow! That's interesting. I'm going to ask you more about that at the end. I wonder if I could neutralize my northern Yorkshire accent.

Esther: Why would you want to do that?

Ben: I know. I know. I could never return back to my homeland. They would just reject me. They'd reject me more than they already do.

Esther: Shame.



Ben: Okay. Let's see. So, could you tell us about sort of like this-- because the title of the tutorial is 9 Steps to Neutralize Your Accent for the IELTS Speaking Test and 1) you briefly just mentioned is to move your mouth differently. Could you talk more about that, please?

Esther: Yeah, sure. A lot of people find-- to speak English really clearly, you need to actually open your mouth more and move your lips more because a lot of languages you don't have to open it as much. So, if you're doing the e vowel you do have to make your mouth smile a bit and if you're doing the u vowel you do have to put your lips forward quite a bit or the w sound.

A lot of people coming from other languages don't actually know that they have to move their mouth a lot and open their mouth more. When you open you actually allow the sound to come out as well and it resonates better obviously and projects better to whoever you're speaking to. So, obviously if you're doing an IELTS Speaking test you want it to come out and go to the



examiner as well, but a lot of my clients or the students have actually said oh, wow! You have to move your mouth a lot more to be clear in English.

So, I'll give you an example. If I say my name is Esther and I was born in Australia and I live in the city of Sydney and I don't move my mouth as much, so there are quite a few languages where you don't have to put your lips forward much or make a smile with your lips or open your jaw much. And if I do it like I would for one of those languages, it sounds like my name is Esther and I was born in Australia and I live in the city of Sydney.

I haven't moved much like I'm not picking on any languages, but Spanish, Japanese, a whole lot of them you don't have to actually move your mouth much and if I do it moving it for English my name is Esther and I was born in Australia and I live in the city of Sydney. So, you can hear the difference, yeah.



Ben: Absolutely. It's much more melodic, isn't it? There's much more like intonation. It is so much richer.

Esther: Yes, yes. So, because even if they're learning the sound er or er depending which accent you're doing it with or u or o. If you're doing it with the British accent-- the standard British accent you actually have to-- I even have to move my mouth more in order to get the standard. So, a, o, o, yeah? So, I actually have to move my lips more and open my mouth more to get that resonance as well.

So, my suggestion here is stand in front of a mirror. Use whatever you're practicing for your IELTS Speaking exam you know the topics and stuff that everybody has to practice and actually overdo it. Open, push your lips forward more, smile your lips more; whatever it is depending on the sound because when you're in the actual exam, you won't remember it unless you've practiced it and feel comfortable moving your mouth that much.



Ben: Right. You almost need to learn it to a level where it's like muscle memory and it's automatic.

Esther: Yes, yes and that makes you so much more clearer immediately; opening your mouth more. That's one of the things. The other thing which I found was really interesting recently I found this out that in English, when our mouth is at rest, our tongue is either on the floor of our mouth, but with the tongue tip directly under the ridge-- the bony ridge behind your front top teeth or on the middle of the bony ridge at rest when you're not talking or anything.

A lot of other languages, not all but a lot of them the tongue is more forward at rest and so that means, for instance, the t for tom and d for door their tongue is forward. So, they have to come back to the ridge to go back up which is why let's say in Spanish your tongue goes more forward behind your front top teeth instead of going up to the ridge for the English t and d. So, you end



up with to instead of to. So, the first one I did my tongue forward, the second one I just went straight up.

So, it's actually interesting and how you pull your tongue slightly back is just by widening the back of the tongue and it just pulls the tip back a bit so it's under the ridge. So, all you have to do is go straight up. I just thought that was an interesting tip there.

Ben: Yeah, yeah. So, it's like-- I think it's as you said, we've got to move the mouth differently and then to practice it to actually gain this skill. You recommended practicing in front of the mirror and exaggerating the movement and also, it seems like if you've got an insight into sort of like the mechanical or the actual physical differences you have to do in the mouth for the sounds as well, that's going to accelerate your progress even further I guess. Is that right?

Esther: Yes, yes, definitely.



Ben: Beautiful. Wow! All right and what other steps could we take, Esther?

Esther: Okay. So, I mean this seems obvious; speak more slowly. Okay. And if you move your mouth more, you will actually speak more slowly. So, that sort of helps with that if you see what I mean. We recently have been looking for a new web developer and we interviewed a few different people and not in Australia, in different countries. And it was fascinating because we interviewed somebody from the north of a particular country and his speech we could understand really well. We interviewed someone from the middle of that particular country and they speak a different dialect and it was so hard to understand this person. He spoke so quickly. It was really interesting.

And just by saying slow down, people find it hard sometimes, but you have to stretch out your vowels and there are various languages obviously that move the jaw much more quickly, so it's



[*speech demonstration*]. The jaw moves more quickly whereas in English, you hit and you stress certain things like I'm doing just there and that allows you to slow down as well.

Ben: Got you.

Esther: And then your listener and your IELTS examiner you have to consciously do it because when we know this, we speed up. So, when you're practicing your IELTS passages or whatever, slow down a little bit more than you normally would so that when you're a bit nervous in the test you will stay at a good rate because you have to do that so that you're taking care of the listener.

Ben: Yes. And just one question, Esther. Since you've started teaching speech and language have you found that you've started slowing down in the rates that you speak or you've stayed the same?



Esther: When I'm coaching somebody, I do actually slow down a bit. Generally, it depends on who I'm speaking to, but it's the same with all of us. If you're speaking to your mother or your partner or whoever then you speed up. You say can I have a cup of tea? You know I'll say it quickly. Can I have a cup of tea? Can I have a cup of tea? You know. So, it just depends on who the audience is. Yes.

Ben: Interesting. Yeah because I found when I was living outside of England and I was only speaking with non-native English speakers. So, I obviously had to slow down and then whenever I went back to England, people said I sounded differently and then after about a week there, I would get up to speed and I would go back to Spain or to wherever I was and then people would be saying you're speaking much faster now because I had adapted to the local-- to the speed in England and I was-- but this is what I noticed as well. To be understood more clearly by my students, slowing down definitely helped. So, that's an excellent tip there, Esther.



Esther: Yeah and it's okay-- sorry. I just need to add one more thing. Sometimes when I tell people to slow down, they think I mean this sort of thing and then they say oh, but I will appear to be stupid. I don't mean that. So, I just wanted to clarify that because sometimes people get confused and they feel like other people will think they're stupid and really it's not that. It's just being clear and other people will just appreciate that they can understand the person.

Ben: Absolutely and also, we've got to be aware of the fact that in our minds it might seem really slow, but to the listener, it's probably-- especially if you add the fact that we've got exam nerves in operation, you probably slowed it down to a more natural speed anyway and it would not sound as silly as you may think.

Esther: Yes, yes. Definitely agree. Yeah, yeah, but yes, I do slow down sometimes when I'm teaching. You have to. Yeah.



Ben: Yeah, totally. Okay. What other things could a student do to neutralize their accent?

Esther: Okay. So, as I said before, you need to change the way your mouth and your jaw and your tongue move and to do this, you need to copy and practice out loud. So, why am I saying this? It seems obvious, but I had a student a while ago who was really quite upset and they wrote to me and said-- and they had purchased one of our courses even-- and they wrote to me and said oh, I'm not getting anywhere. I listened to your course and I listened to BBC Radio and-- because they were listening for the British accent-- and I'm not getting anywhere. And I actually emailed back and said are you just listening or are you listening and repeating? And they said oh no, no, no. I'm just listening.

And the trouble with that is changing the way you move your mouth-- and it was good that he was listening because you have to make a new auditory recording in your head of the sound of the language you want or the pronunciation that you want, but you also need as you said earlier,



you're making new muscle memory. You're learning to organize and move your mouth in different sequences. So, you literally have to mimic and repeat aloud.

And in our courses, we've got lots and lots of material and very specific instruction for every vowel and consonant and higher-level dialogues and all sorts of things, but you know that idea-- a friend of mine also he was in a class learning Italian and he said there was another girl in there who never practiced aloud. She just read and she thought she was going to be able to speak Italian with an Italian accent if she didn't actually practice it in her mouth.

Ben: Yeah, yeah. I totally agree with you there. I mean I remember saying to my students you can't learn to ride a bike by reading a book. You got to do it you know. You got to get on the bike and it's exactly the same with languages. And also, I've had students in the past who have bought the course, worked through the modules. They didn't get the grade, so they email me and I'm like-- they asked for a refund and I'm like hey you did zero. You wrote zero essays. You did



not send a single essay in to be corrected and on top of that, I can see from my dashboard you only did like 30% of the videos. It's no wonder you failed, you know.

So, I totally agree with you there and from my personal experience of learning a language, repeating it out loud takes a lot of courage and even now. I'm learning Hungarian and I will only mutter it to myself. I'm really scared of just sounding silly, but this is where the progress comes from. If you can get yourself an uncomfortable position and just get make friends with it I think.

Esther: Yeah and you know even if you just change one or two things and then you bring them into your speech in whichever language or pronunciation you're learning, people won't notice. They won't go oh, what-- you know. They won't think something weird has happened. They won't actually notice. Or if you go into the coffee shop and you put on the pronunciation that you're practicing and you only use it for one small sentence, at least you've tried it. And I know it does take courage. You're right. Yeah.



Ben: That's an excellent piece of advice there. You've got to-- I mean from personal experience learning languages and the sooner you can put it into practice, the better as well. So, yeah. Good point there. What else would you recommend a student do?

Esther: Okay. So, once you've learned-- so language is made up from the sounds, okay? You need to know the vowels of-- or start neutralizing your accent with whatever your original vowels are to go more towards the vowels you need in whatever; American, Australian, British, whichever.

The other thing is running underneath that in any language are the stress and rhythm patterns and intonation. And English listeners listen for the stressed words, yeah?

Ben: Yeah.



Esther: So, they don't-- the to and the for and the and the was and the and the are not that important unless you have to stress them for a reason. The other words that make the main meaning are important and so that's why it's important to learn to stress the right syllable in words, to stress words in sentences especially if you're going to be doing an IELTS test because that gives you the extra points as well-- yeah, because you're not just going in. So, a lot of languages-- English is a syllable-timed language, okay? So, it's [*speech demonstration*] and how you get that is stressing and de-stressing different things: syllables, words, yeah?

A lot of languages-- so how do you stress? How do you stress? So, how you stress is you find the syllable or the word that is going to be stressed and you find the main stressed vowel and you make that longer slightly. We're talking nano here. You make it longer, slightly louder, and slightly higher pitch, okay?

Ben: Right.



Esther: And then you put it all together. Stress-timed languages, which are a lot of other languages, a lot of the syllables and the vowels have more or less equal length, so you can get [*speech demonstration*], yeah? So, I'll do the two together again. [*speech demonstration*]- this is English --[*speech demonstration*] and the other is [*speech demonstration*]. So, you can hear the difference. Yeah.

Ben: The second one sounds like Spanish in my understanding.

Esther: Yes, that's right and a whole lot of Asian languages and a whole lot of Indian languages and some of the European languages. Yeah.

Ben: Right. Interesting.

Esther: And a lot of the African languages as well. Yeah.



Ben: Right and then how can you get to grips-- I mean how could a student get to grips with a syllable-timed language? Is it through learning the rules? Are there any exercises?

Esther: Yeah. Okay. So, there are a few elements with stress and rhythm. So, one of them is okay, if I'm going to say a word I need to know-- so, I'm not going to say account. I'm going to say account, yeah? The count is stressed. So, starting to learn which syllable is stressed; that's one thing. The second thing is linking. So, put it on. It's almost like it becomes one long multi-syllabic word, yeah? Not put it on with a break in between. So, that's linking.

The other thing is phrasing. So, I'll give you an example. If I say a sentence-- I'll give you a sentence and I'll do it syllable-timed. Then I'll do it stress-timed then I'll tell you what I did to make it sound stress-timed, okay? So, hi-- sorry. This is the syllable. This is the [*speech demonstration*]. Hi Mrs. Jones. My name is Esther. I'm calling to confirm your appointment with



Mr. John at 10 a.m. tomorrow. You can hear it sounds very choppy [*speech demonstration*].
Okay.

Now, if I do it stress-timed which is English and then I'll tell you what the elements were. Hi Mrs. Jones. So, we're also introducing pausing and chunking, grouping. So, hi Mrs. Jones. My name is Esther and I'm calling to confirm your appointment with Mr. John at 10 a.m. tomorrow. So, I paused after each group of words. So, in a longer sentence in English, we group the words together.

Ben: Okay. Could I just ask you so the English one the last one you did with the pausing and the chunking, that's syllable-timed, right?

Esther: No, that's stress-timed.

Ben: Okay. Sorry, sorry. Got you. Okay, okay, okay.



Esther: Yeah.

Ben: Okay and then syllable-timed--

Esther: [*speech demonstration*] Hi Mrs. Jones. I'm calling to...yeah? That's syllable-timed.

Ben: Right.

Esther: It sounds choppy. So, the stress-timed, which is English, I group words together in a long sentence. So, if I say I went to the shops and I met my friend and we had a coffee and then we went shopping, you can hear there are different groups depending on the meaning of the three or four words that I grouped together. So, I went to the shops. That's one piece of information. I met my friend. That's a different piece of information, yeah? And in between, I'm doing a slight pause.



So, I'll reread this other sentence. Hi Mrs. Jones. My name-- so there's a slight pause there. I'm not going hi Mrs. Jones. My name is Esther and I'm calling to confirm... yeah? Hi Mrs. Jones. The other reason is I'm stressing main meaning-- sorry. The other reason is I'm allowing the IELTS examiner or whoever I'm speaking to to take in different pieces of what I'm saying. If I run it all together then it's like hang on. Hang on. I'm just computing one part of the sentence and you've moved on to another.

Ben: Exactly. Yeah, yeah.

Esther: Yeah and the other piece of that is so hi Mrs. Jones. Slight pause. My name is Esther. Slight pause. So, the pauses in English are really important, okay, as well and then inside of that, I'm stressing the main meaning words. So, Mrs. Jones, name Esther, calling to confirm your appointment, Mr. John, 10 a.m. tomorrow. Those are the words that get stressed.



Ben: Right. Okay.

Esther: Emphasize those words, yeah?

Ben: So, for a student, they really need to improve or to neutralize their accent improve their speaking score if they can get a hold on breaking up the speech into these groups and adding these micro pauses and moving towards a more stress-timed language. This is going to vastly-- it's going to help them a lot, right?

Esther: Yeah, yeah.

Ben: Beautiful.

Esther: We have lots of different material in our course that you can practice this with and obviously copying the trainer as well. So, how do you know which words to group? You group words on an average of 4-5 words that feel they belong together because of the topic or the



information, yeah? In written language, it's often where the commas are or the full stops or the colons or whatever and you stress the words in the sentence that give the most important information.

Ben: Right.

Esther: So that's just a summary. Yeah.

Ben: Beautiful, beautiful.

Esther: It's not an easy element, but it's important, yeah.

Ben: Yeah, totally. Totally. I was thinking while you were saying I was like yeah. If a student if they're reading it out loud then if they really pay attention to the commas, it can make a big difference. Just putting in like you said-- exactly like you said those micro pauses just to ease the flow of information and help the listener process it easier as well.



Esther: Yeah, which is what you and I are doing as we're talking to each other. So, you just did that. You grouped and you paused and you grouped and you paused and you stressed certain words so that I would pay attention to those words.

Ben: Yeah, I was also struggling to find the words as well. I'm not going to lie.

Esther: You covered it very well. Okay. Can I add another something?

Ben: Yes, yes, please.

Esther: So, one of the things that gives away people and makes them unintelligible is if they don't make their long vowels long enough in English.

Ben: Right.



Esther: So, for example, if I say I'll leave the book here. I'll leave the book here rather than I'll leave the book here, yeah? So, if it's a long e or a long u or whatever it is, make it long enough. Maybe make it a nano second longer even because people are used to shortening them and it'll be okay, yeah?

Ben: Yeah. I think-- I was just going to say I think in English-- in England is probably more specific that we swallow a lot of the last part of the words and we make them shorter especially with some words and we'll just cut off the ending, but as you said, with some you just cannot do that and they have to be long. I mean we can get away with it because maybe the context and whatnot, but in an exam, you definitely don't want to be swallowing anything. You want to be pronouncing it to its full extent. And also as you just mentioned, do not go short on the long vowels.



Esther: And then a lot of people have trouble with the diphthongs and triphthongs. These are vowels made up of two vowel sounds or three vowel sounds said quickly together. So, I'll give you an example of the British accent diphthongs, so two vowels together and obviously, we have in our American and Australian courses we have specific how to use and how to say these for those accents. So, people often say I'll make it instead of I'll make it, yeah? And in the British--standard British accent, sorry, I know there are a lot of British accents. We're talking standard here.

Okay. It's [*speech demonstration*] and your lips have to go [*speech demonstration*]. You have to smile at the end. You can't just do the [*speech demonstration*] and say make instead of make, yeah? So, before the k your lips have to do the e even if it's quick, yeah? Another one is o. A lot of people say they're on the phone instead of the phone, yeah?



Ben: Yeah and that's interesting that last one because in Yorkshire they don't say phone. They say phone and it's yeah, yeah. Sorry. And I had to modify that when I was teaching and I did exactly what you did. Now I'm remembering, I would have to-- it sounds like I was miserable, but I would force myself to smile while I was talking in my standard British accent.

Esther: I know. I know. I know. And look, I really love dialects and stuff, but that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about an IELTS exam. We're not talking about you know fitting in in Yorkshire or Sydney or you know Melbourne or somewhere, you know.

Ben: Exactly. I mean it hurt I had to kill my own dialect, but that's you know-- there's no point teaching students a Yorkshire accent. It's not going to get them anywhere. We need to get students to pass the exam. It's teaching the standard way exactly like you're doing and like I was doing when I was teaching as well. It's the way forward, yeah.



Esther: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I've got a few more. Have we got time or?

Ben: Yeah, yeah, definitely. Definitely.

Esther: Okay. So, the next one is when a native English speaker speaks English, there's a lot of air [*speech demonstration*]. It doesn't matter which dialect it is I think and so if people don't aspirate or put a puff of air with their unvoiced consonants especially p for poly, t for tom, and k for kitten, it can definitely take away from the clarity. So, if I say the word t-a-l-k, okay? If I say it not aspirated so the t and the k-- so sorry.

When you aspirate p, t, and k it's as if you're whispering them; [*speech demonstration*], okay? Lots of air, but if I do it without doing the air I get [*speech demonstration*] t-a-l-k [*speech demonstration*] instead of talk. And if you aspirate your t and your k or whatever or if the end



consonant of the word is an unvoiced one in other words p, t, or k-- there are others, but these are the main ones-- then the vowel gets shortened, too. [*speech demonstration*] instead of talk, yeah?

Ben: Right. Right.

Esther: Yeah. So, learning to-- so to not to, yeah? And pie, not pie if that makes sense. Yeah, yeah.

Ben: And how does a student develop this skill? Is it through just listening more or what can they do?

Esther: Okay. So, what they can do is-- so, if you are aspirating out a p for poly, for instance, you close your lips and then you build up the pressure like you normally do and then you pop your lips open and let the air come out. So, [*speech demonstration*].

Ben: Right. Okay.



Esther: And then when you put it into a word, the vowel is going to have voice, but the [*speech demonstration*] doesn't have voice. It's just like you're whispering, yeah?

Ben: Right.

Esther: So, if you're in the movies and you're saying can I have a pie, yeah? So, pie. So, you overdo it at first. You let air out at the same time that you pop your lips open-- allow your lips to come open with the pressure. So, you would have to practice. So, pie, please, paper. Now, mainly you aspirate at the beginning of words, sometimes at the end if it doesn't have another word after it. So, two, talk; you can hear I'm letting air out at the same time as I drop my tongue down. Cat, kitten. I'm overdoing it, but you have to overdo it at first.

Ben: So, it's a case of learning which vowel sounds need to be aspirated and how to aspirate them afterwards.



Esther: Yeah, which consonants; only the consonants. Yeah, the unvoiced ones. I'll tell you which they are. They're p, t, k, f. So, it needs a lot of air. It can't be [*speech demonstration*], yeah? [*Speech demonstration*], yeah? They're the ones that have no voice. So, if you said those sounds purely-- [*speech demonstration*] --you don't feel any vibration on your throat, but when you say [*speech demonstration*], you feel the vibration if you put your hand on your Adam's apple.

Ben: Interesting. Right. Wow! Okay and I--

Esther: Oh, yes.

Ben: Super. Yeah, that would definitely help a student. I mean there's one thing listening and talking all the time to improve your English, but if you can learn the rules as well, that's going to accelerate your progress even faster.



Esther: Yeah. We have a whole video training on aspirating consonants as well because it isn't-- it's not something you think about normally when you're learning to pronounce English.

Ben: Absolutely. Yeah, yeah. I've heard about it before, but it's an incredibly technical thing to teach and it really takes like a dedicated a professional, an expert to produce a specific tutorial on it who's got knowledge and who can actually teach that.

Esther: Yeah. So, it's in the thing so you can learn it from that, but yeah. The other thing I would say is for people to make sure that they've learned the English [*speech demonstration*] whether it's the American, Australian, British, whichever accent Canadian, whatever, but learn the [*speech demonstration*] because the r for rabbit is different in every language as we know.

Ben: Okay.



Esther: And the thing with English is that if they're learning the British or the Australian accent, the o-r, e-r, and a-r vowels do not have the r said. Okay. So, form, yeah? British and Australian form, card, burn. So, [speech demonstration] form, [speech demonstration] card, [speech demonstration] burn, but if you're learning the American accent, you do put them in. So, you can hear the difference, yeah? Form, card, burn.

Ben: Right, right. Yes. Yes.

Esther: So, that's those vowels, but other than that, if you're saying red, you can't do red and you can't do red. It's got to be lift your tongue up and hold it there and make the proper r .Yeah.

Ben: Yeah. Just quickly before we move on to the next one, I remember I was telling some American friends about a car like a vehicle, an auto vehicle that my dad had just bought and they kept asking me what's a car. What's a car? And then I was like a car, you know. What you're



driving I mean. Oh, a car, but yeah, you're totally-- it's bringing back memories, but the r sound is extremely important because as we've just learned that even native English speakers can mess it up and not understand each other. So, yeah. Excellent point there.

Esther: Yes, definitely and you know I have a friend whose father came from Ireland and for the life of me I couldn't understand him.

Ben: Yeah, I've been there before as well. You could give him your course.

Esther: Yes. No. I mean he's fine. It's just I couldn't understand him, but yes, exactly. Yeah. Yeah. I know, yeah. We all have our different accents. A lot of people can't understand Australian accents because they're not watching Australian TV. They're watching American or British TV if they're looking at English speaking shows.



Ben: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean I've been the same. I couldn't understand a guy from Limerick once, but I think after a while you can tune in you know and then it starts to get a little bit easier, but if you're-- I think if you're aware of-- if you've worked on your accent, then your hearing is going to be more sensitive and it can just speed up the whole process of tuning in.

Esther: Yes. Definitely. Definitely. Yeah.

Ben: Super. Okay. I think we've got two more points. Is that right?

Esther: Yes. I'll go-- yes. The next one is t-h and not many languages have t-h. I know that Spanish has a t-h, but they don't actually use it the same way as we do in English. So, learning the t-h is important like learning the r. It makes a huge difference to clarity. So, not this but this and not this but this and not-- let me think-- thumb not thumb but thumb.



Now, the trick here with t-h very quickly is to hold the tongue in the t-h position between the two teeth-- the top and bottom teeth-- for long enough. Don't pull it back too quickly otherwise you'll get something like think. Think. It's think. You have to give it its value. You have to let the air escape. It's another aspirated consonant where you let the air escape. So, you hold it on your tongue between your teeth for a nano second longer and let the air escape first and then move to whatever the rest of the word is. So, think, three. You can hear that air or that. So, your tongue should vibrate if you're holding it on that nano second longer with the voiced one. That, this, those, these, yeah?

Ben: Yeah.

Esther: Otherwise if you pull it back too quickly, it doesn't sound right.



Ben: Exactly. I remember teaching this in Spain so clearly and I would exaggerate it because there was a massive problem with it not being held long enough and that's the key. And I could see them like if I close my eyes I can see them thinking this sounds too long and I'll be like no that is perfect. It might sound a little bit unnatural at first, but you've just got to do it enough times until it feels natural for you because it is a long sound.

And it is important because I think the is like no. 2 or no. 3 in the most used words of the English language. So, it definitely needs to be practiced and implemented as soon as possible I think. That's what I was working on when I wanted to improve the pronunciation with my students.

Esther: Yes. No. Definitely. I totally agree because as you said, it's one of the most common words. And if they think it's too long, that's okay because when they speed their speech up, they won't hold it as long, but it still has to be held long enough. So, if you're over holding it when you speed up, it'll come back to the normal holding length if you like.



Ben: Got you. Yeah, yeah. Definitely. That makes sense. It makes complete sense. Okay. And then the final one no. 9. What was that?

Esther: Okay. So again, English has a lot of what we call consonant blends or consonant clusters. That is when you have two consonants or three in English or four in a row said together without a vowel in between, okay? So, I'll give you first. It's not [*speech demonstration*], yeah? And hand; it's not [*speech demonstration*]. And didn't; it's not [*speech demonstration*]. So, you have to hear the n to the t. And the reason that sometimes people leave it off is because a lot of languages don't have consonant blends or they have consonants close to each other with a very short vowel in between, but we have these consonants all together.

In longer words like currently, you've got three in a row; n, t, and l.

Ben: Right. Right.



Esther: And there's a trick to it where you don't let the t go. You actually put it up to its position up behind your front top teeth and the ridge there and then you just move it. You don't drop it like you normally do to release a t. In fact, n, t, and l are made in the same place. It's just the tip of your tongue moves forward smidge a tiny bit or changes its shape a tiny bit. So, you keep your tongue up there for n then you change the tip for t and you change the tip for l, but you don't drop the t and that's the hack of a native speaker.

Ben: I've never thought about that. It's just come naturally thank goodness.

Esther: Sorry. I know I'm getting too intricate here, but it's-- so currently. I'm not going currently, but sometimes there's a bit of a hack. The native speakers use a hack to get to and from three consonants in a row if you see what I mean. In the word accomplish, the hack is that you do the com quite long. Allow yourself a smidge of time to then do plish. Accomplish. So, you've got m, p, and l all in a row there. Yeah.



Ben: Right. Wow! This does sound-- and I guess that there must be a tutorial on this in your course as well because this sounds incredibly technical.

Esther: No. Look, most of the time people don't have to worry about it. What they have to worry about in the IELTS test is just making sure they say all of the clusters or not leaving a t off the end of first or something like that. Do you know what I mean?

Ben: Yeah, yeah. Totally. Totally. Yeah. I remember a polish friend saying that like the end sound is one of the hardest because you've put a lot of energy into forming the word and then it's the very end of the word-- I think she was saying it the third person singular actually because there's a lot of different criteria to think about; the amount of people, the tense and once you've got all that in and then you've just got to put the s on as an afterthought, but I think organizing the actual words and the pronunciation is incredibly important. Okay.



Esther: And when in doubt-- if they're in the middle of an IELTS test and when in doubt and they know they've got a multi-syllabic-- a word of more than one syllable coming and it's got a few consonants together, slow down because that allows your mouth time to organize itself to get to all those sounds.

Ben: Absolutely. Yeah, that's a genius tip there. Just slowing down you not only give your mouth the time to organize and get into position, but you'll also free up some-- you'll also gain a few extra micro seconds just to organize the next sentence or the next words that are coming out. So, yeah. Excellent point there. Okay, Esther.

Esther: I just want to say one last thing. I know there was a lot in that. Sometimes people feel discouraged because there's a lot, okay? What I mean to say is practice one or two elements. Get them automatic then practice another one or two elements. Already you'll be cumulatively a lot clearer than just four elements, okay? So, if somebody changes one or two things-- t-h and an r



and a little bit of stress-- already they're a lot clearer or opening their mouth more or whatever. So, don't be disheartened.

Ben: Yeah. That's excellent advice that. I mean I do that all the time when I'm learning a new skill. I'll just break it down to the smallest, try and master the smallest elements, and then move on to the next because if you attack all of those nine pieces of advice that Esther has shared today, it's going to be a humongous-- it's not going to be humongous, but it's going to be incredibly-- you're going to move slower in all nine areas than if you'd have just concentrated on one or two, excelled, and then moved on to the next couple. So, great advice there.

All right, Esther. So, how can a student reach you and what courses do you have and what's your site name as well?



Esther: Sure. Our site is speakmoreclearly.com and we have a British accent online course-- as I said before, you can just use it to neutralize or be clear. You don't have to get a whole British accent if you don't want, but there are people who do. So, any of our courses you can just use to neutralize your accent, reduce your accent, speak clearly, or get that accent.

So, we have a British accent course, an Australian accent course, and an American accent course. We also have a voice course which is not about accent. It's for people who want a richer voice and who want to project or who have to speak in front of people a lot and breath control and all of that sort of stuff is in there as well. Yeah.

Ben: Interesting. Wow! Yeah, that'd be really good for like an advanced student who really just wants to take their English to the next level. Beautiful. All right. Well, thank you very much, Esther. It's been absolutely wonderful. It's been a great time and I've learned an absolute ton. So,



thank you very much and good luck, students, with your IELTS exam and as you just heard, if you want to keep on working on your speaking, then you can check out speakmoreclearly.com and check out the courses there. And also Esther is available for private tuition as well. Is that right, Esther?

Esther: Yeah. Anywhere in the world, yeah. Of course over Zoom or Skype or whatever. Yeah.

Ben: Super.

Esther: Thank you. It's been really great. Thank you, Ben. It's been fun.

[Music]

Female Voice: Thanks for listening to ieltpodcast.com