

## 10. Reading Comprehension

1. What according to Shaw are the advantages in learning to speak well?
2. a) What is meant by a provincial or cockney dialect?  
b) Can you name some important native dialects of English?
3. a) Is there such a thing as ideally correct English?  
b) Do all British speakers speak exactly alike?  
c) What are the examples cited by Shaw to prove his statement?
4. What are the two simplest and commonest words in English?
5. When can we say that somebody's speech is acceptable?
6. Does Shaw offer himself as a model? What does he say about his own speech?
7. Does Shaw speak to his wife as carefully as he would speak to a queen?
8. If he were to speak to his wife at home as carefully as a public speaker speaking to a large audience, what would she think?
9. When he says 'What?' two or three times to his wife at breakfast what does she suspect?
10. Does Shaw advocate listening through the keyhole? Why not?
11. Why are home manners different from company manners?
12. "What o' clock is it?" - How does his wife hear it?
13. Why should we adjust our speech style to the occasion? Do you do it in your own language?
  
14. a) Why does Shaw urge foreigners not to try to speak English perfectly?  
b) Do you think it is sound advice? Is he speaking with his tongue in his cheek?  
c) Can you mention a play that Shaw wrote to prove his point of view?
15. a) "In London nine hundred and ninety nine out of every thousand people not only speak bad English but speak even that very badly."  
- Can you explain what it means?  
b) "Even among English people, to speak well is a pedantic affectation. " - What does it mean? Why?

### Guess the intended meaning

Write out the sentence under each statement that correctly explains the meaning of the italicized expression or expressions.

1. "I am afraid you must put up with me." (Paragraph 1)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Shaw is frightened and he is taking you to stay with him.  
\_\_\_\_\_ He politely says that you must tolerate his way of speaking.
2. "That is good enough of her." (Para 7)  
\_\_\_\_\_ That is all that is necessary or  
\_\_\_\_\_ needed. She deserves only that.
3. "He will suspect you of being a beggar or a confidence trickster." (para 8)
4. \_\_\_\_\_ In a foreigner it is something worse than an affection.  
\_\_\_\_\_ It is something worse than a kindly feeling.  
\_\_\_\_\_ It is something worse than being unnatural or pretending to be genuine

The responses in the following conversation are those of a person whose knowledge of English is very elementary. Do you think Shaw will approve of the responses? Rewrite the responses in good English.

A: Where were you

born? B: I born on

ship.

A: What was the name of the ship?

B: I not know.

A: What nationality was your

mother? B: She French.

A: Where is your mother

now? B: She die.

A: Who is your

father? B: I not

know him.

A: Did your mother tell you

about him? B: He English. A

seaman I never see.

A: When did your mother die?

B: Excuse \_ I not know.

A: Do you know how old your were when your

mother died? B: I six year old.

A: Afterwards, who looked after you? B: I take care myself.  
A: Can you read and write? B: I write name.

(From Arthur Hailey's 'In High Places')

In the following sentences the meaning intended is not clear. Can you rewrite the sentences so that the meaning intended is made clear?  
(Some clues are given to help you.)

1. He killed the man with a stick. (How? Who?)
2. I went to my villa ge to sell and land along with my wife. (What was to be sold?)
3. The committee's appointment was not satisfactory. (What was not satisfactory?)
4. Do not go other shops to be disappointed, but come to us. (For What?)
5. Would you like to try on that dress in the window? (Where? What?)
6. He loves his dog more than his wife. (Who loves who?)
  
7. I have smoked one of your cigarettes, and shall in future smoke no others. (gave up smoking)
8. The college may refuse admission to anyone they think proper. (Who may be refused admission?)
9. The report that the students were reading annoyed the warden. (What were they reading?)
10. Jim curse the day he was born. (When? What?)

The following expressions are used in the Indian variety of English. Can you put them in Standard British English?

1. The meeting was pre-poned.
2. The matter will be referred to the concerned ministry.
3. Why you came late to the class?
4. They are having three cars.
5. Look at the alphabets of English.
6. Go and enjoy.
7. In find it difficult to make by both ends meet.

8. You may be knowing that officer.
9. We are living here since 1970.
10. Newspaper advertisement: "Wanted a Non-vegetarian Cooker 45 years old"

Shaw was outraged by the irrational spelling of English. He said, "My surname has two sounds; but I have to spell it with four letters: another 100 percent loss of time, labour, ink, and paper. The Russians can spell it with tow letters, as they have an alphabet of 35 letters. In the race of civilization, what chance has a power that cannot spell so simple a sound as Shaw against a rival that can?"

1. Can you suggest simpler ways of writing the following words?  
 a) enough            b) queue    c) should    d) love e)  
 f) finally            g) quality    h) photo    i) all right
2. Indian English as it is spoken is highly influenced by the spelling. There are people who pronounce the following words as they are written. Can you say how they are to be pronounced? Psychology, summer, plumber, subtle, bottle, bomb, colonel, drought.
3. Think of your first language (i.e your mother tongue). Do you think all those who speak it speak exactly alike? Are there variations among individuals? Are there variations between two speakers of your first language? Are the speech habits identical? Similar? Can you point out some variations in accent, in the use of words, etc., between individuals, regions, and social classes?
4. Think of your first language. Do you adjust your speech style to the occasion?  
 Can you give some examples?

## Notes

This lesson is a Gramophone recording for the Linguaphone Institute given by George Bernard Shaw, a well known personality in the history of world literature.

Shaw here emphasizes the point that there is no such thing as ideally correct English and no two Britishers speak English exactly in the same manner. He says that because of his rich experience as a public speaker and also as a playwright he was appointed by the British Broadcasting Corporation as a member of a committee whose main aim was to develop a model of correct English speech for the British Islands. The Committee was chaired by a poet Laureate who was also an artist and his materials are the sounds of Spoken English, and a specialist in pronunciation Johnston Forbes Robertson, a well known actor known for the beauty of speech was also a member of this committee which was a heterogeneous blend of Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Oxford and American members. All these members could be recognized by their difference in speech and hence we can't conclude that they spoke English correctly. They, of course, spoke English presentably which is easy to comprehend. Imitating them would make us persons of good social standing. It is also astonishing to note that this committee sometimes did not agree to the usage and pronunciation of most of the simple and common words of English.

Shaw says that the two commonest words in English are 'Yes' and 'No'. But no two members of the committee pronounce them exactly alike. Yet there are some people who find delight in avoiding them. Shaw points out that good effort is needed to comprehend or to follow words, syllable by syllable. He says that he is speaking carefully to an audience of thousands of gramphonists. But if he speaks carelessly as he speaks to his wife, the audience can't make out, and at the same time if he speaks carefully at home, his wife thinks that he has gone mad.

The usage of English differs from situation to situation. One would indeed be labeled mad or insane if one talks to his wife in the same manner as he does at a Gramophone recording and vice - versa. Shaw, in a lighter sense, asks us to be careful even while speaking to wife and the conversation between a husband and wife should be like a conversation between a King and a Queen. Unfortunately that doesn't happen with all of us.

Shaw classifies manners into two types namely Company Manners and Home Manners which also vary according to the situation. Family members do

not speak among themselves in the manner as they do on ordinary occasions when they are in the presence of an outsider. Shaw further adds by citing an example of 'key hole moral' the listener gets surprised to note the difference between two situations. The difference is greater in speech than in anything else.

Foreigners need not speak English perfectly if they want to travel in England and if they are wise to be understood these. Even if they do so, they will not be understood since a vast majority in London speaks bad English. If a foreigner speaks perfect English, he/she will be suspected of being a beggar or a confidence trickster. Speaking English too well is in fact a pedantic affectation. George Bernard Shaw further mentions that the stranger, hears every syllable distinctly when he asks him what O' Clock is it? But his wife hears it as "Cloxst", because it is good enough for her but not to the listener.

Shaw emphasizes that there is no such thing as perfectly correct English and there is presentable English which we call "Good English". In London, Shaw points out that Nine hundred ninety nine out of every thousand people don't only speak bad English but speak even that very badly. They neither speak it correctly nor be understood when it is well spoken. He suggests the foreigners, to speak with a foreign accent, and speak broken English, that is English without grammar. Then, the native understands the foreigner and try to understand and gets ready to help.

The native never expects the foreigner to be polite and to use elaborate grammatical phrases. Shaw cites an example ie.,

"Will you have the goodness sir,  
to direct me to the railway  
terminus at charing cross"

But if the foreigner shouts  
"Please! Charing Cross! Which way!"  
the stranger would have no difficulty, responding to it half a dozen people will immediately over whelm to help.

If any foreigner requests the native, pronouncing all the vowels and consonants beautifully, how will not understand, and would suspect him to be a beggar or a confidence trickster.

Finally, G.B. Shaw suggests us that one must not speak too well even with cultivated people, during private inter course also. While dispelling the fears of foreigners with regard to the language G.B. Shaw says that little

knowledge is adequate to travel England, and adds that to speak too well is a pedantic affectation, even among English people. G.B. Shaw says that is an insult to the native who can't understand his own language when it is too well spoken.