

# How to Improve Your Spoken English:

## The Role of Key Consonants in Accent Reduction

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Here is a question for all you non-native speakers out there:

*Which is arguably one of the most important muscular parts in the human body for achieving good American English pronunciation?*

The answer? The tongue. The tongue is a key muscular component of proper American speech because it is used to formulate a number of consonant sounds in the English language. Many non-native speakers have trouble with enunciating certain consonant sounds because they are not in the habit of using their tongues when speaking in their native languages. As we go over a couple of consonant sounds below, vocalize the consonants and check to see which of them you especially have trouble with:

**N & L:** To pronounce these two consonants, put your tongue tip *against your gum ridge*. To find your gum ridge, first touch your tongue tip against the back of your upper front teeth. Next, move the tongue tip up until you feel the fleshy part right above your teeth. That's your gum ridge. Vocalize each sound.

**D & T:** Find these two consonant sounds by bouncing your tongue tip off the gum ridge. Vocalize each consonant.

**TH:** Form this sound by sticking your tongue out between your upper and lower front teeth. Make sure that your teeth are touching the tongue as you make the 'TH' sound. Feel the vibration (your tongue should feel ticklish at this point) as you vocalize the sound.

**R:** Enunciating this consonant sound involves taking your tongue back towards your throat and arching it at the same time. In my opinion, this is one of the toughest consonants to pronounce in the English language. Many non-native speakers – especially those of Asian-Pacific descent – have the tendency to drop the 'R' sound in their speech. On the other hand, Indian speakers tend to put too much 'R' in their speech.

For non-native speakers enunciating consonants clearly is crucial to being understood by native speakers. Even for native speakers, having a "lazy" tongue can be detrimental to the professional image that they wish to project in the corporate world as well. To pronounce these consonant sounds (and all others) properly, you will need to re-train your tongue to go to the right positions in the mouth quickly and accurately. This re-training process will take some time and patience on your part, as well as the guidance of an experienced coach.

In my accent reduction coaching, I prescribe specific exercises to help my clients formulate new American speech habits. If you need help with reducing your foreign accent, please do not hesitate to contact me (858-380-8538, <http://www.JoanneChen.com/>).