

Why English sounds faster than it really is

Anglický text s pracovním listem · Úroveň: Středně pokročilý (B1-B2) · 5 otázek · Klíč na samostatné straně



interaktivní verze

Jméno: _____ Třída: _____ Datum: _____ Skóre: _____ / 5

Text

You have been studying English for years, but the moment a native speaker opens their mouth, the words seem to arrive twice as fast as they should. Almost every learner knows the feeling, and almost every learner draws the same conclusion: these people are talking far too quickly. Researchers have a name for that impression, and it is not a flattering one: the Gabbling Foreigner Illusion.

In a 2019 study, a French-led team compared speakers of seventeen languages and measured two things: how fast they spoke, and how much information each syllable carried. Individual speakers ranged from about four to nine syllables a second, yet the rate at which they delivered information hovered around thirty-nine bits per second, whatever the language. Basque squeezes fewer than five bits into a syllable, Vietnamese packs in eight, and the less a language carries per syllable, the faster its speakers talk.

So if speed alone does not explain that impression, why on earth does English feel so fast? The honest answer is that we are not fighting speed; we are fighting the fact that speech has no spaces in it. Writing gives us a helpful gap after every word, but the sound wave does not, and the listener has to work out where one word ends and the next begins. In your own language you do this thousands of times an hour without noticing; in a foreign one it takes so much effort that the speaker seems to be racing.

English then makes life harder for the listener by changing the shape of its own words. Little grammar words are almost never stressed, so their vowels collapse into the flat, neutral sound that phoneticians call a schwa. That is why the “can” in “I can swim” sounds nothing like the “can” in a dictionary, and why “to” and “of” shrink to little more than a murmur. Neighbouring sounds blend too, which is how “did you” ends up as something close to “didja”, and how the t in “next day” quietly disappears. None of this is lazy or sloppy; it is simply what fluent English sounds like, and the careful dictionary form is the exception, not the rule.

What does not work is asking people to slow down, because slow speech is not the speech you will hear outside the classroom. Play one short clip three or four times, then read the transcript while the audio plays, and your ear will start to find the joins; the words were there all along, hiding in plain sound.

Slovíčka z článku

Anglicky	Výslovnost	Česky
syllable	/ˈsɪləbl/	slabika
stress	/stres/	přízvuk

Anglicky	Výslovnost	Česky
schwa	/ʃwɑ:/	neutrální samohláska, schwa
weak form	/,wi:k 'fɔ:m/	slabý tvar (nepřízvučná výslovnost)
to gabble	/'gæbl/	drmolit, breptat
to blend	/blend/	slévat se, mísit se
to squeeze	/skwi:z/	vměstnat, zmáčknout
to hover	/'hɒvə/	pohybovat se kolem, vznášet se
to shrink	/ʃrɪŋk/	scvrknout se, smrštít se
to work out	/,wɜ:k 'aʊt/	přijít na, odvodit
transcript	/'trænskɪpt/	přepis nahrávky
join	/dʒɔɪn/	spoj, šev, místo napojení
murmur	/'mɜ:mə/	zamumlání, mumlání
sloppy	/'slopi/	nedbalý, odbylý

Otázky k textu (zakroužkujte správnou odpověď)

1. What is the “Gabbling Foreigner Illusion”?

- A) The impression that a foreign language is spoken faster than it really is
- B) A trick teachers use to slow their own speech down
- C) The tendency of foreigners to speak too loudly
- D) A dialect of English spoken only by non-native speakers

2. What did the 2019 study find when it compared seventeen languages?

- A) Every language was spoken at the same number of syllables per second
- B) Languages that carry less information per syllable are spoken faster
- C) English turned out to be the fastest language in the sample
- D) Slower languages delivered less information in total

3. According to the article, what makes listening genuinely hard?

- A) Native speakers use too many rare words
- B) English has more syllables per second than other languages
- C) Speech has no gaps to show where one word ends
- D) Recordings used in classrooms are of poor quality

4. Why does the “can” in “I can swim” sound different from its dictionary form?

- A) Because it stands at the end of the sentence
- B) Because British and American English pronounce it differently
- C) Because “can” has two unrelated meanings
- D) Because unstressed grammar words shrink to a schwa

5. What does the article recommend doing about it?

- A) Asking native speakers to slow down
- B) Replaying one short clip and reading its transcript
- C) Learning the dictionary pronunciation of every word
- D) Avoiding recordings until your grammar improves

Klíč - řešení s vysvětlením

1. A) The impression that a foreign language is spoken faster than it really is

První odstavec: badatelé tak označují dojem, že rodilý mluvčí chrlí slova dvakrát rychleji, než by měl.

2. B) Languages that carry less information per syllable are spoken faster

Druhý odstavec: baskičtina vměstná do slabiky necelých pět bitů, vietnamština osm, a čím méně toho jazyk do slabiky uloží, tím rychleji jeho mluvčí mluví.

3. C) Speech has no gaps to show where one word ends

Třetí odstavec: psaný text nabídne mezeru za každým slovem, zvuková vlna ne, a posluchač si hranice slov musí odvodit sám.

4. D) Because unstressed grammar words shrink to a schwa

Čtvrtý odstavec: krátká gramatická slovíčka skoro nikdy nenesou přízvuk, takže se jejich samohlásky slijí do neutrálního zvuku zvaného schwa.

5. B) Replaying one short clip and reading its transcript

Poslední odstavec: text prosbu o zpomalení výslovně odmítá a radí pustit si jednu krátkou nahrávku třikrát až čtyřikrát a při přehrávání si číst přepis.