

Perfectionism 2

Introduction

Hi, Lori here welcoming you to another episode of Real English Conversations from BetterAtEnglish.com. In today's conversation, my friend Yvette and I continue our discussion about perfectionism. The main focus of this part of the conversation is how perfectionist tendencies can cause problems in foreign language learning, particularly for adult learners. Another thing that comes up is a couple of usage differences between British and American English. So without further ado, here is the conversation:

Conversation Transcript

Lori: But you know, speaking about correction, it's kind of interesting when you think about learning a language as an adult, how perfectionism and having, like, demands on yourself when it comes to performing...I think that's one of the biggest differences between learning the language as an adult and, then, *picking one up* as a child.

Yvette: Yeah I remember when I was in university at the very beginning in the first year I spoke British English with a British English accent, and I was studying American English or American studies. And I had a lot of American-speaking professors who, umm, just, you know, I thought it was really odd to be using British language to talk to an American professor, so I switched to American English, which was really *frowned upon* because it was not the "proper" language. And everything that you did, every word you used, you had to think, "Is this the proper American word or is it a British-ism?" Because it was...you were punished much more severely for using British-isms as an American speaker than if you were a British speaker using American words. It was really weird.

Lori: Yet there's this kind of weird...at least in some classroom contexts...there's this weird elitism when it comes to British English and American English, and like there's these weird *synthetic* rules about what you're allowed to say and what's acceptable and what isn't. And, you know, native speakers out in the world, they *mix and match* as they see fit.

Yvette: Right. Right, because, like, I would have to *look out* and make sure that I didn't use the word "pavement," and you can say that very American-like...pavement...and then they would be like, "No, it's 'sidewalk.'" So, you're wrong." And it's like, "Oh, you know what I mean, though!"

I know that I got punished for that, and there were other things like "ten after six" or "ten past six"...I, you know, if you say something like "ten past six" in American voice it's really wrong because you have to say "ten after six," which is something I didn't even know until I was corrected. And it was like, "Oops, I didn't know there was a difference."

Lori: Wow, well, speaking as American I would say that's something I didn't even know.

[Laughter]

Yvette: *There you go!* So, but then you get to the perfection level, then you want to be absolutely correct.

Lori: But yeah, sometimes I wish I could get back to the state that I remember having as a kid. You know -- when I'm trying to create something and start battling with perfectionist tendencies and procrastination and all the demands I place on myself, and the ones that I imagine that other people are placing on me -- I wish I could just *throw it all out the window* and just approach it with the *carefree abandon* that I remember having as a little kid.

Yvette: The thing of course is when you...now you work, and it actually...you make money doing things and people expect a certain standard of you, and you try to hold to that standard but often that standard is in your own head and it's not even what they're expecting you to do.

So you **end up** doing a lot more work for something that is really not worth the money that you get paid for it.

Lori: Yeah. **There is that** as well.

Yvette: **On top of that!** But you know, as a kid I think I was already quite perfectionist in everything, I... everything had to be perfect, everything had to be done properly.

Lori: Yeah.

Yvette: And I felt like I was going to get punished if I didn't, so that -- not to say anything bad about my parents, but, because I don't think they ever held me to that standard; they always said, "Do your best and that's good enough." But for me it had to be perfect, and then it's maybe "okay."

Lori: Yeah. Yeah, but, but even so I can still remember, like, approaching new things and just being willing to just try new things that I knew I was going to **suck** at, because there's no way you can be good at something right at the very beginning. And it just didn't matter; you were willing to just **give it a go** anyway. And now I really sympathize with the people, my, my students that I used to have when I taught English, my adult students, how horrible it can be to sit in a group...and you know you need to try to speak the language but you know you're going to make mistakes and you know it's not going to be right but you have to force yourself to try anyway. And it's...I think, yeah, for people like me anyway, it's really hard to force yourself to do that.

Yvette: Well yeah it is, it is about **letting go** of the judgment that other people are going to have. You know, when I, went I went to the United States for the first time and I felt really kind of embarrassed about speaking English, people were very surprised that you were able to even speak the language and understand what they were saying because they had no idea of what you were saying if you spoke Dutch. I mean, they were like, you know, I could switch to Dutch and they were like, "I don't know, that sounds really strange and odd." And so that kind of helped me along at the time because I knew that my, you know, what I could do or how I could speak was better than what they could speak my language, and they very often would say, "Well, you speak better English than I do." And I thought, "Oh, I don't think so."

Lori: Yeah, well you know most...your English is fantastic, as you know, as I've often told you.

Yvette: Well, thank you.

Lori: But,

Yvette: That's right!

Lori: But, even so, most Americans, they're just amazed that anyone can speak a language other than their own, because even though I think most of us do study a foreign language in high school, oftentimes it never gets past the classroom level, you know, the school level, where really, you can do okay on written tests but you can't really have a conversation.

Yvette: Yeah, and that's the thing, and it's also, you know, other little phrases that people use all the time when they speak, which is probably what this is all about. it's just speaking and listening to people just talking...normal phrases instead of these textbook phrases that nobody understands anyway. I mean, or nobody uses.

Lori: Yeah, they're so **far removed** from what you hear out in the real world that it's...

Yvette: Right. "I would like a hotel room..."

Lori: Please, for one. Please.

Yvette: With a bath. With a bath and a shower.

[Laughter]

Final Words

That's all for this time. In our next conversation, we'll be talking about some of the British and American English usage questions that came up in this conversation, particularly with respect to the prepositions "past" and "after" when talking about time. As always, the full transcript and vocabulary notes for this podcast are available on our website, BetterAtEnglish.com. Thanks for listening, and bye for now!

[Vocabulary notes on next page]

If you enjoyed this lesson from Better@English, we'd really appreciate your support. There is a lot you can do to help:

- ✦ Tell your friends about our website, www.betteratenglish.com
- ✦ Write a nice review about Better@English on iTunes
- ✦ Subscribe to our RSS: <http://feedproxy.google.com/betteratenglish>

Thanks!

Vocabulary notes

picking one up	To <i>pick something up</i> means to learn something in an informal way without formal study or teaching, much like children learn their native languages.
frowned upon	To <i>frown upon</i> something is to disapprove of it. Often used in the passive (<i>X is frowned upon</i>) rather than the active (<i>Y frowns upon X</i>).
synthetic	Unnatural, man-made, artificial.
mix and match	The phrase <i>mix and match</i> is a fixed phrase (that is, you can't say <i>match and mix</i>), meaning to combine different things in a way that suits your personal preference. It's often used to describe putting an attractive outfit together from different pieces of clothing.
look out	To <i>look out</i> (also <i>watch out</i>) means to pay careful attention to something, often to avoid danger .
There you go!	<i>There you go!</i> in this context is an informal way of showing agreement or support for what someone just said or did.
throw it all out the window	In this context, <i>to throw something out the window</i> is a metaphorical way of saying <i>to forget about</i> . This metaphor is often used when referring to forgetting about or ignoring intangible objects (things you can't touch) such as thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
carefree abandon	<i>Carefree</i> (adj.) means without care, or without worries. <i>Abandon</i> (n.) means, "In a wild or uncontrolled way." The two words <i>carefree abandon</i> tend to "collocate," that is, they tend to be used together as a pair.
end up	To finally be in a particular situation or place.
there is that	In this context, <i>there is that</i> is a fixed phrase that shows agreement or acknowledgement. For example, if someone is complaining about all of the negative aspects of something, and then you mention a positive aspect, they can acknowledge your point by saying, "Well, there is that!"
on top of that	An informal way of saying "in addition to" that.
suck	To <i>suck at something</i> (Am. E) means that you are bad at it. This is an extremely informal expression that some people would even consider vulgar. You can also say that something <i>sucks</i> , which means that it is bad or unpleasant.
give it a go	To <i>give something a go</i> is an informal way of saying to <i>try</i> , to <i>attempt</i> . A similar phrase is <i>to have a go</i> at something.
letting go	In this context, <i>to let go of</i> something means to ignore it and not let it trouble you.
far removed	In this context, <i>far removed from</i> means <i>very different</i> , or <i>not related to</i> .