






Help! It's a native speaker.

Hamse schon gehört? Noch 'nen Kaffee? In der Umgangssprache ziehen Muttersprachler Wörter zusammen oder lassen sie ganz weg. Ein Lerner versteht dann oft nur „Bahnhof“. Üben Sie mit **VANESSA CLARK**, und schon bald werden Sie die Alltagssprache entziffern können.   

The bus I often take from Heathrow airport to Oxford is full of foreign students and tourists who have just arrived in the country. I always feel sorry for these passengers when, over the background noise of the bus, the driver asks “Where ya goin’, mate?” (“Which stop would you like, sir?”) and “Ain’t ya got nuffin’ smaller?” (“Haven’t you got anything smaller?” — in other words, coins).

The spoken language you hear when you visit a country is often very different from the clear phrases and sentences in your phrase book or course book. You can’t control the speed at which the words come at you, nor can you use a dictionary. Background noise and different voices and accents don’t help either. Spoken English is usually less formal than the written language, and native speakers use slang and colourful idioms. They swear (*fluchen*) more and

make references to popular culture that you may not understand if you don’t live in the country.

The good news is that the grammar and word order of spoken English have developed especially to help communication. Facial expressions, body language and tone of voice also give you useful signals about meaning. Some experts say that less than 10 per cent of face-to-face communication is verbal, so you’re already getting a lot of the message, even if you don’t understand all the words.

Here, we explore the aspects of spoken English that make it difficult to understand. We don’t want to teach you to speak like an English bus driver, but we do want to help you to understand spoken language better.

To get the most out of the article, listen to the free audio tracks online and download the audio transcript at www.spotlight-online.de/audio

Being spontaneous

Spoken language is usually spontaneous. In everyday situations, we don't plan what we're going to say before we speak. We make false starts, search for words, repeat or interrupt ourselves and leave sentences unfinished.

If you see a spoken conversation written out word for word, it's amazing how often the main idea is broken up by "um" and "er" and the other little phrases we use to help us talk and think at the same time. As listeners, we concentrate on the main message and filter out the rest.



1. Getting the message...

Go to www.spotlight-online.de/audio and listen to the phone message from your friend Jo on track A. Identify the main points and note them down opposite.

Vagueness

When the prime minister makes a speech, he knows his facts and figures and chooses exactly the right words to communicate his message. When he's at home, though, he is probably as vague [veɪg] as the rest of us. Instead of exact numbers, we use phrases like "a bit", "some", "one or two", "a lot of", "a whole load of" and, if we are Americans, "a whole bunch of". Instead of selecting a noun, we talk about "something", "things", "stuff", "something like that" and "you know the kind of thing I mean". And before adjectives, we use vague expressions like "a bit", "kind of" ("kinda"), "sort of" ("sorta") and "like".

Sometimes you will hear the word "this", meaning "a":

- The other night I was in **this pub**, right? And **this bloke** (*Kerl, Typ*) comes in and starts shouting.

Which pub? Which man? It's not important. "This" is very often used in a non-specific way, especially when we're telling stories.

2. ...and things like that

Change the story below from a spoken to a written style by replacing the vague words in bold (*fett*) with the specific ones in the box.

bags and jackets | on Monday | six
the Rialto | unnecessarily

- It was just **the other day** = _____.
- I was in **this** = _____ café.
- Then **a bunch of** = _____ teenagers came in.
- They were **kind of** = _____ loud.
- They started throwing their **stuff** = _____ around.

