

# English: The language of oppression or opportunity?

Issued by [Wits Language School](#)

26 Nov 2018

Having to communicate professionally in English sometimes strikes fear into the hearts of many South Africans irrespective of their gender, age or business field; the mere thought of presenting to a group of colleagues in English or submitting a report to your manager is daunting and nerve wracking. If you are one of the many, do not be embarrassed; you are in good company.

Despite South Africa's recognition of 12 official languages and its embracing of multilingualism, English continues to be the dominant language within schools and workplaces and competence is considered a pathway to upward mobility and professional opportunities. While it is evident that one requires good English skills to excel academically and professionally, little attention has been paid to improving the English proficiency of South Africans. This may in part be because English is an official language and it is assumed that all South Africans can speak English well. However, the differences in the type of English one is exposed to and the difference between fluency and accuracy are overlooked.



South Africans are unique; we are multilingual, vibrant and dynamic individuals who utilise a wide variety of linguistic resources when we communicate. It is not odd to find us communicating in multiple languages at the same time; we code switch when we cannot remember the correct English word or when we want to express a thought accurately but cannot find an appropriate English word and we do it effortlessly and automatically. These skills set us apart as innovative language users as we mesh and blend languages in our common goal to communicate accurately.

Unfortunately, these skills do not hold us in good stead in the workplace where standard and 'proper' English is required and suddenly we lose confidence and nerve. We become more conscious of how much we do not know and question what we do know. It is easy to feel overwhelmed and paralysed by fear when you have to communicate solely in English and are suddenly evaluated against monolingual, Western, middle class norms. Furthermore, it is easy to assume if we incorporate more complex words and use lengthy phrases as well as adopt an American or British accent, our English language skills will suddenly improve. This is a myth; do not believe it!

In order to communicate effectively and appropriately, one needs to be cognizant of the following factors: the audience, the purpose of the message, the message itself, the grammatical accuracy of the message and the tone of the message. Simply put, one has to ensure that the meaning of the message is always concise and coherent and is phrased in a manner that can be easily understood by the reader or listener. Secondly, one has to ensure that the grammatical accuracy of the message is maintained; editing and proofreading are essential in order to win the reader's or listener's confidence in what you are communicating.

Here at Wits Language School, we are passionate about improving the language skills of South African second language learners and our courses are especially designed to help you improve your English language skills. We offer a wide range of courses specifically aimed at professionals who want to enhance their professional English communication skills. Some of our most popular courses are:

|                                           |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Communicative Grammar                     | <p>Are you interested in improving your editing skills and English grammar knowledge?</p> <p><a href="#">Join</a> our Communicative Grammar course.</p>                      |
| English Speaking and Pronunciation        | <p>Do you want to improve your pronunciation and gain more confidence speaking in English?</p> <p><a href="#">Join</a> our English Speaking and Pronunciation course.</p>    |
| Business Writing                          | <p>Are you interested in improving your proposal or minutes writing skills?</p> <p><a href="#">Join</a> our Business Writing Skills course</p>                               |
| Presentation Skills                       | <p>Do you want to give presentations that are dynamic and interesting?</p> <p><a href="#">Join</a> our Presentation Skills course.</p>                                       |
| Report Writing                            | <p>Do you want to write reports that are coherent and well organized?</p> <p><a href="#">Join</a> our Report Writing course.</p>                                             |
| English for Critical Thinking in Business | <p>Are you interested in improving your critical thinking skills and becoming a strategic thinker?</p> <p><a href="#">Join</a> our Critical Thinking in Business course.</p> |

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