TONGUE TIED BRITS STRUGGLE WITH OU'S AND AH'S

Tuesday 11 March, 2014

• Over 82% of Brits admit to mispronouncing words and place names
• Most cite odd spelling as the reason for getting words wrong
• Top word for mispronunciation is Cambridge city, Ely
• Nearly half (41%) admit to correcting someone's pronunciation in conversation

It is widely recognised that English is one of the hardest languages to learn, so much so that it seems Brits still get tongue tied when it comes to pronouncing certain words and place names.

According to new research from St Pancras International, four in five (82 per cent) of us admit to getting our ou's and aa's mixed up in conversation. Women struggle the most with one in five (20%) saying they have trouble getting their mouths around everyday words such as 'prescription' and 'espresso'. Those in the North West are word wizards with only 17% getting it wrong, while the Northern Irish (93%) struggle the most.

The words people have the most trouble getting their mouths around are:
1. Ely (59%)
2. Keighley (40%)
3. Sherbet (40%)
4. Et cetra (34%)
5. St Pancras (33%)
6. Espresso (26%)
7. Bruschetta (25%)
8. Often (24%)
9. Prescription (21%)
10. Greenwich (16%)

Dr David Lewis, Neuropsychologist and author of bestselling book Impulse. Why We Do What We Do Without Knowing Why We Do It, explains: "There are four main reasons why people make little slips when pronouncing certain words. The first is because they believe that is how the word is pronounced, usually because that is how their family or friends say it. Second, certain words are genuinely difficult to pronounce, including ironically the word 'mispronunciation'. Third, when a word is unfamiliar people try to work out how it should sound by following the spelling. Because our spelling is full of idiosyncrasies this can often lead them astray.

"Finally we often fail to engage our conscious brain when speaking aloud what we are reading. As a result we see what we expect to see rather than what is actually there. In the phrase 'Paris in the the Spring', for example, many fail to notice the second 'the'. It's the same with St Pancras. When seen for the first time the brain reads this as 'pancreas', the insulin producing gland, and that is how it is pronounced thereafter. Thinking before speaking and pausing before saying can save many embarrassing errors of pronunciation."

Most of us put our mouthy mix ups down to the fact that:
• Words are said completely different to how they are spelt (55%)
• Certain words are simply difficult to say (18%)
• Silent letters are confusing (6%)
• Repeating what someone else said (5%)

Wendy Spinks, commercial director of HS1 (owners of St Pancras International) - which features at number five in the trickiest words to pronounce - said: "We are always hearing people referring to the station as St Pancreas when we walk round and with the rise of social media, more and more people are mixing the two up both in speech and text.

"It is completely understandable though as people are more familiar with pancreas. In addition, it is a much easier word to say as it has three syllables allowing the speaker to elongate their speech and giving them longer to get their mouth around it."

When faced with a tongue twister mid-conversation, 23% of Brits admit to asking the other person how to say it, with a further 17% stopping and apologising for getting mixed up.

Related Sectors:

Charities & non-profits :: Education & Human Resources ::

Related Keywords:

Pancreatic Cancer :: Pancreatic Cancer Action :: St Pancras International :: Misconceptions ::

Scan Me:

Nearly a third of people (28%) say they don't care what people think and will say what they want. Men go one step further with over 35% not caring if they mispronounce something during a conversation.

Not everyone is happy to make mistakes though, nearly half of those interviewed (41%) admit to correcting someone when they make say a word wrong.

Ali Stunt from Pancreatic Cancer Action adds: "While it can be amusing when people mix up St Pancras and St Pancreas, it also serves as a positive inadvertently by raising awareness of a disease that has been little known for far too long. Pancreatic cancer is the fifth most common cause of cancer death in the UK, and has had the same shockingly low survival rate of three per cent for 40 years. If more is known about the disease and its symptoms, this will hopefully lead to more people being diagnosed earlier and an increase in the number of survivors so any awareness is a great. "

Company Contact:

Pancreatic Cancer Action

T. 0303 040 1770
E. comms@panact.org
W. https://www.pancreaticcanceraction.org/

View Online

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
https://www.pancreaticcanceraction.pressat.co.uk