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Pronounce Foreign words the English way!

Arun K. Behera, Ph.D.

Difficulties with Pronouncing English Words

Learning English pronunciation has never been easy. This becomes all the more difficult when it comes to mastering the pronunciation patterns and accentuation relating especially to foreign words or loan words or words borrowed from some other languages. Heteronymous words in particular pose serious problems in terms of the pronunciation for the non native users of English or those for whom English is either a second or a foreign language.

Importance of Loan Words in English

English language is known for its loan words. There are thousands of words and phrases that English has borrowed from other languages and they have become a part of the English vocabulary. Some of these words use diacritics which make them more difficult for its users. Occasionally these foreign words accepted into use in English retain their diacritical marks as they are.

No Diacritics in the Script Used in English

However, as English does not make use of diacritic marks, it is generally considered acceptable to omit them. There exist then two sets of similar looking words, one set with the diacritic marks and the other without any. And interestingly, they are pronounced differently.

A List for You to Practice

I have given below two sets of words: one with diacritic marks and the other without any. This is not the exhaustive list of words but some commonly used words only for illustrative purpose.

attachés / ə'tæʃeɪz / (Noun: a diplomatic official attached to an embassy, especially in a technical capacity).

Ex. *The Indian attachés in the US embassy met the President.*

attaches /ə'tætʃɪz / (Verb: assigns).

Ex. *He attaches a lot of importance to the family.*

exposé / ek'spəʊzeɪ / (Noun: a public exposure or revelation).

Ex. *Certain cheap media make a fortune out of sensational exposés.*

expose /ɪk'spəʊz / (Verb: to lay open to danger, attack, harm etc.).

Ex. *You should not expose yourself to the rain.*

lamé / 'la: meɪ / (Noun: a fabric of cotton interwoven with gold or silver thread)

Ex. *The merchant presented his sister a lamé on her birthday.*

lame /leɪm/ (Adjective: impaired or disabled through defect or injury)

Ex. *We should help the lame person cross the road.*

maté / 'mɑ:teɪ / (Noun: a tealike South American beverage made from the dried leaves of an evergreen tree).

Ex. *When we visited their house, they offered us maté.*

mate / meɪt / (Noun: an associate or friend).

Ex. *One of my classmates won a prize for drawing.*

pâté / 'pæteɪ / (Noun: a paste or spread made of puréed or finely chopped liver, meat etc.).

Ex. *The chef from France put some pâté in the curry that gave it the flavour.*

pate / peɪt / (Noun: the crown or top of the head).

Ex. *The burglar hit the guard on the pate.*

resumé / 'rezju:meɪ / (Noun: a brief account of personal, educational and professional qualifications and experience, prepared by an applicant for a job).

Ex. *The manager asked Satish to send his resumé by Monday.*

resume / rɪ'zju:m/ (Verb: to continue after an interruption).

Ex. *They resumed their journey after the monsoon.*

rosé / 'rəʊzeɪ/(Noun: a pink table wine).

Ex. *The waiter was asked to serve rosé to the delegates.*

rose / rəʊz/ (Noun: a beautiful flower).

Ex. *Rose is the symbol of love.*

Context IS the Key

It is abundantly clear from the two sets of words supplied above that the loan words or foreign words with diacritic marks are pronounced differently from the English words without any diacritic

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marks. Since there are no specific rules governing the diacritics nor are there any rules pertaining to the pronunciation of such words, the non-native speakers find it really hard. Of course, context can always help us out in finding out the meaning of a word.

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