

RECURSO GRATIS • NIVEL PRINCIPIANTE

Más allá del acento

A B1 story about speaking with confidence, improving communication, and refusing to confuse difference with deficiency.

VOICE

CLARITY

BELONGING

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ANTES DE LEER

Prepare to read

Andrés knows his field, but he becomes increasingly quiet at work after repeated comments about his accent. An important presentation forces him to reconsider what effective communication sounds like.

Think before you read

What is the difference between improving clarity and trying to erase an accent?

Reading goal

Notice vocabulary for communication, pronunciation, and belonging. Evaluate both personal strategies and workplace responsibility.

THE STORY · PART 1

Speaking less each week

Andrés was a civil engineer on a team designing a new pedestrian bridge. He understood the calculations, construction schedule, and river conditions better than most people in the room.

During meetings, however, he rarely spoke unless someone asked him a direct question.

The change had begun after a senior consultant repeatedly interrupted him with, 'Could you say that again?' Sometimes the request was reasonable. Other times, coworkers had understood perfectly.

Once, after Andrés presented a safety concern, the consultant joked that the team needed **subtitles**. Several people laughed uncomfortably.

Andrés began rehearsing every sentence in his head. By the time it sounded perfect, the conversation had moved forward.

His manager, Priya, noticed his **hesitation**. She asked him to lead the public presentation about the bridge's environmental design.

'You know this section best,' she said.

Andrés wanted to refuse. The audience would include city officials, reporters, and residents.

Instead, he asked whether the company would pay for a presentation **coach**. He wanted feedback on pacing and pronunciation before speaking publicly.

Priya agreed, but she also asked an important question: 'Are you requesting support because you want it, or because our meetings have made you feel that your voice is a problem?'

Clarity without erasure

The coach, Naomi, recorded Andrés explaining the bridge. Together, they identified moments when he spoke too quickly or placed stress on an unexpected **syllable**.

She did not promise to remove his accent. 'Everyone has one,' she said. 'Our goal is to make your meaning easy to follow, especially when the information is technical.'

They practiced pausing after important numbers, defining specialized terms, and using visual diagrams.

Naomi also noticed that Andrés's voice became quieter whenever he anticipated criticism. His anxiety sometimes affected **clarity** more than pronunciation did.

Meanwhile, Priya addressed the team. She established a rule against jokes about language and reminded employees to ask specific questions instead of saying vaguely, 'I cannot understand you.'

The senior consultant defended himself. He said communication was part of professional **competence** and accused Priya of avoiding honest feedback.

Priya agreed that clear speech mattered. However, feedback should identify an actual communication problem and offer a path to solve it. Mockery accomplished neither.

Andrés appreciated her response, though he did not want her to fight every battle for him.

At the next meeting, the consultant interrupted again. Andrés calmly asked, 'Which word or idea was unclear?'

The consultant could not identify one. Another engineer summarized Andrés's point and returned the discussion to the bridge.

THE STORY · PART 3

A voice that belongs in the room

On presentation night, Andrés felt nervous but prepared. He began with a map and explained how the design reduced construction inside the river.

He spoke more slowly than usual, paused after key figures, and repeated one complicated term in simpler language.

During questions, a resident asked whether maintenance costs had been considered. Andrés answered clearly and admitted which estimate was still **uncertain**.

Then someone commented, 'Your English is very good.' The person sounded kind, but the surprise inside the compliment made Andrés uncomfortable.

He smiled and replied, 'Thank you. I have worked in English for many years, and engineering has its own language too.' Then he continued.

The presentation succeeded because Andrés had improved his delivery—not because he had hidden where he came from.

Afterward, a bilingual high school student approached him. She said she wanted to study engineering but worried that people would judge the way her family spoke.

Andrés told her to develop every communication skill available: pronunciation, structure, listening, visual explanation, and the courage to ask for clarification.

'But do not wait until you sound like someone else before sharing what you know,' he added.

Back at work, Andrés continued practicing. He also spoke earlier in meetings, before perfection could silence him.

Belonging did not mean that every listener would understand every word immediately. It meant his knowledge and perspective were treated as part of the conversation, not as an interruption to it.

An accent tells part of a person's journey. It should never be mistaken for the limit of what that person can contribute.

Words for voice and belonging

subtitles	subtítulos
hesitation	vacilación
coach	entrenador/a
syllable	sílaba
clarity	claridad
competence	competencia / capacidad
uncertain	incierto/a
delivery	manera de expresarse
mockery	burla
belonging	sentido de pertenencia

COMPREHENSION

Read between the lines

A. Choose the best answer

1. Why does Andrés speak less in meetings? a) He lacks technical knowledge b) He rehearses until the topic changes c) Priya forbids questions
2. What does Naomi focus on? a) Erasing his accent b) Technical accuracy only c) Pacing, stress, and clear structure
3. What new question does Andrés ask the consultant? a) Which idea was unclear? b) Can I leave? c) Do you speak Spanish?
4. Who approaches Andrés after the presentation? a) A reporter b) A bilingual student c) The consultant

B. Interpret

1. Why can 'Your English is very good' feel uncomfortable even when it is intended kindly?
2. How do Andrés's individual practice and Priya's workplace changes address different parts of the problem?

C. Write

Write two respectful phrases for requesting clarification and two confident phrases for responding when someone does not understand you.

ANSWER KEY

Review and reflect

A. 1. b 2. c 3. a 4. b

B. Suggested answers

1. The surprise may suggest that the speaker expected lower ability because of an accent or background. 2. Andrés improves genuine clarity and confidence, while Priya addresses mockery and unfair communication habits in the workplace.

Useful phrases

Clarification: Could you explain what you mean by that term? / Did you mean the schedule or the total cost? Response: Which word or idea would you like me to repeat? / Let me explain that point in a different way.

KEEP GOING

Discuss: Who shares responsibility when communication is difficult?