

BBC Learning English – Q & A of the Week 134

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Voiceless Consonants 清辅音

Feifei: 大家好, 欢迎收听《你问我答》节目。我是冯菲菲。

Rob: ...

Feifei: Erm, Rob, aren't you going to say hello?

Rob: ...

Feifei: 真是不好意思, Rob 今天不言不语, 不知道是怎么了。Rob, hello! Hello!

Rob: Hi Feifei. Didn't you realise, I was practicing my silent consonants.

Feifei: I think you mean your voiceless consonants 清辅音。They're not silent, it's just about how they're pronounced.

Rob: Really? Voiceless consonants. Well that's what today's question is all about.

Insert

I've heard from some classmates that some voiceless consonants will be pronounced as voiced ones. I'd like to ask you in which situation will such things occur. Could you please tell me? Thank you.

WANGYUNXIU, CHINA

Feifei: 谢谢 Wang Yunxiu 提出的这个问题。她的问题是, 在英语里, 有些清辅音 voiceless consonants 有时候又会被浊化, 那么怎么判断什么时候是清辅音, 什么时候是浊辅音呢? So that's voiced and voiceless. Can you help?

Rob: Well, I'll try. Let's begin by explaining what a consonant is.

Feifei: A consonant is a speech sound 辅音。辅音又分了两大类 – 清辅音和浊辅音。

Rob: Yes. But some of these sounds use the voice and some don't, so they are voiceless.

Feifei: But do you know which one is which?



Rob: I think so! You can't see the difference but you can hear it. Just put your finger on your throat when you make the sound. If you feel a vibration, the consonant is voiced.

Feifei: Exactly. 大家可以试着把手指放在自己的喉咙上面，然后发音，如果觉得声带震动了，那这个辅音字母的发音就是浊辅音。

Rob: So can you tell the difference between...

Insert

vvvvvv

Rob: ...and...

Insert

fffff

Feifei: The first sound makes a vibration in my throat. And with the second sound there is no vibration. It's just air. 那么这个字母发音没有震动声带，所以就被称为清辅音。

Rob: That's right. And what sound is this?

Insert

ssss

Feifei: No vibration so that's a voiceless consonant.

Rob: Yes!

Feifei: Why does this matter so much Rob?

Rob: Well in English, sometimes the only difference between two words is if they are said with a voiced or voiceless consonant.

Insert

*My Dad drives a big red van.
My Mum is a big fan of opera music.*

Feifei: 单词 van 的第一个音节发音就是浊辅音；单词 fan 的发音就是清辅音。So we need to get the sounds right. 但是...

Rob: But, that doesn't answer today's question.

Feifei: No. Wang Yunxiu wanted to know why her classmates say that some voiceless consonants are voiced.

Rob: Maybe they just want to be heard!



- Feifei:** I don't think so Rob.
- Rob:** I was joking actually. I think her classmates are talking about the difference between how consonants are written and how they are pronounced. Let me explain. When certain consonants are grouped together it can change the voiced or voiceless quality of the consonant that follows.
- Feifei:** 不同辅音字母组合的变化有时会影响其后面辅音字母的发音。We need some examples Rob.
- Rob:** Well for example at the end of regular past tense verbs. That's when you add 'ed' to a word, such as lived.
- Feifei:** 规则动词在变一般过去时态的时候，通常后面需要加上 -ed, 那这个 -ed 的发音什么时候是 d, 什么时候是 t, 什么时候是 id, 什么时候又是 it 呢?
- Rob:** If a verb ends with a voiced sound like 'm', 'v' or a vowel sound, we make the regular past tense verb with another voiced sound, 'd', so we say seemed, filled, lived or played.
- Feifei:** The sound is subtle. 如果动词本身发音是以浊辅音结尾的，那么动词过去式 -ed 在这个动词后的发音就应该是 'd'.
- Rob:** And if a verb ends with an unvoiced sound like 'p', 'k' or 'f' we make the past tense with another unvoiced sound 't' so we say hoped, looked, stuffed.
- Feifei:** So we say 't' which is unvoiced but it's spelt '-ed' which is voiced. I think that's what Wang Yunxiu is talking about.
- Rob:** Yes. It's the difference between how they are spelt and how they are pronounced.
- Feifei:** 如果动词本身发音是以清辅音结尾的，那么动词过去式 -ed 在这个动词后的发音就应该是 't'. But sometimes I hear a past tense verb ending with the sound 'id'.
- Rob:** '-id' is said when a word finishes with the letter 't' or 'd'. It's tricky to say a word like decide in past tense so we add a vowel and pronounce it decided.
- Feifei:** Mmm, it's complicated. 如果动词以字母 d 结尾，那么-ed 在这个动词后的发音就是 id; 如果动词以字母 t 结尾，那么-ed 在这个动词后的发音就是 it.
- Rob:** Exactly. But it's worth listening and practicing these sounds. That's voiced and voiceless.
- Feifei:** Practice makes perfect!
- Rob:** It does but hopefully we've given Wang Yunxiu a perfect answer. If you have a question you'd like us to answer, please email us.
- Feifei:** 请把你的问题发送到 questions.chinaelt@bbc.co.uk



Rob: It would great to hear from you.

Both: Bye bye.

