

Siu Hoi-yat:

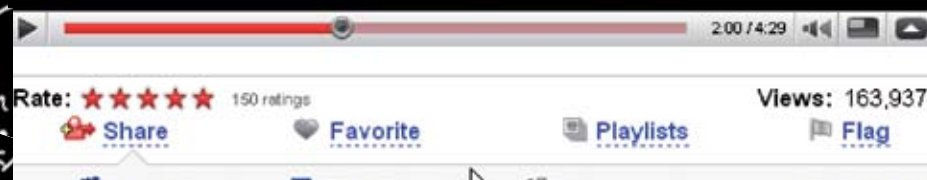
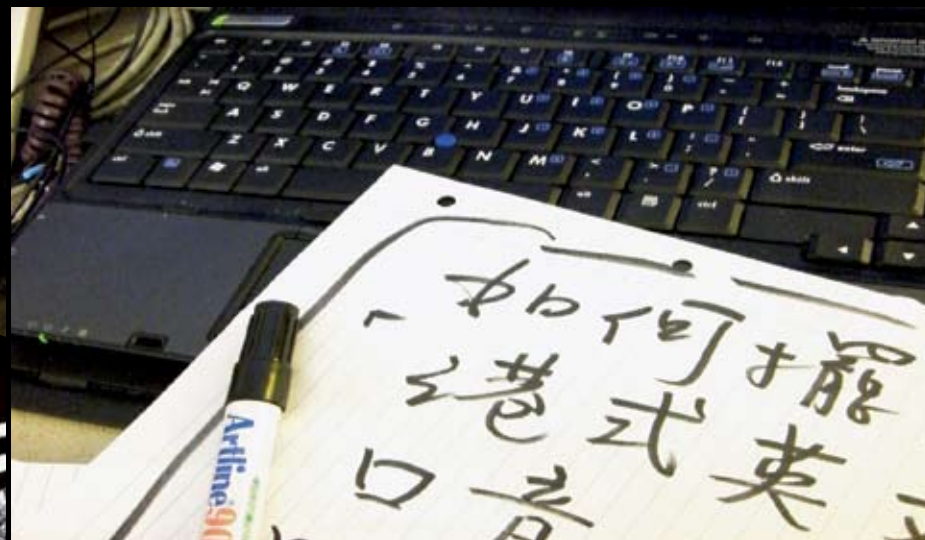
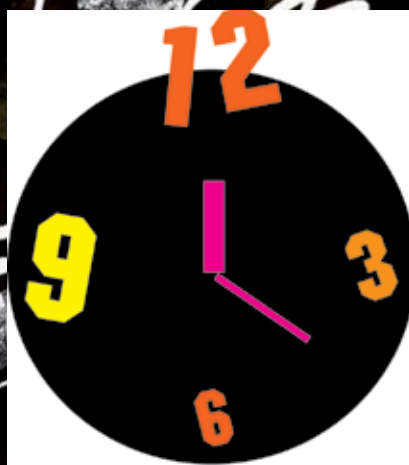
a native wannabe

by Amelia Loi



Name: Siu English
Occupation: Teacher
Gender: Male
Motto: I Don't Teach, I Share.

2009 JAN 11



The ultimate goal of learning a language is to speak it like a native. To speak like a native has always been the goal for Siu Hoi-yat, a popular English teacher who is well known for his idiosyncratic online methods of teaching English pronunciation.

The 25-year-old's English-teaching video on his blog had received millions of hits and, in 2007, the blog has earned him the Blog Award by *China Times*, one of the major Chinese-language dailies in Taiwan. He also writes columns for two local Chinese dailies, *Mingpao Daily* and *Sing Tao Daily*.

To Siu, trying to speak like a native is fun. However, inspiring students to love English is just as important to him.

Two years ago when he was further studying in political philosophy in England, Siu started to make English-teaching videos so as to keep in touch with his students back in Hong Kong. In these videos, he always demonstrates the movement of the tongue and lips with his hands to show the students how to pronounce English words.

“Usually I hold my camera with my left hand and my pen with my right hand to write on paper,” he said. Sometimes he has to use both hands to demonstrate the position of the tongue and mouth, with the camera placed on a bottle of strawberry jam as a tripod.

“I have a bottle of strawberry jam on which I put my camera. Actually it sounds stupid,” he said excitedly while laughing.

He has kept on producing videos after he returned to Hong Kong. He now works as the course director for an educational institute for adults and teaches a course called “Speak English like a native”.

Though producing these videos is quite time-consuming, he enjoys it immensely.

His videos can be found in YouTube and also in his blog. His posts of teaching materials on Facebook have received many positive comments from other people and Siu is prompt in replying any comments.

As for his blog, according to his first book *A Language Lover's Guide to English*, which was published last July, the number of total views have now reached 3.8 millions.

According to Siu, some comments on his blog say that it was okay for Hong Kong people to have a Hong Kong accent in speaking English, as long as they can communicate. But Siu does not totally agree with this.

“It’s okay, but speaking like a native should be the ultimate goal (for every language learner). It is hard for a foreigner to speak like a native, but it is fun trying.”

He tries to achieve this goal by having a section called “How to get rid of Hong-Kong-accented English” in his teaching video.

Drawing from his own experience, Siu emphasises the importance of being interested



COURTESY OF SIU HOI-MAT

Siu is happy to share with his students about how to get rid of Hong Kong accent in speaking English. He often gives talks in the learning centre.

The bottle of strawberry jam is very important when Siu needs to demonstrate pronunciation with both hands.

“It is hard for a foreigner to speak like a native, but it is fun trying.”



QUOTES OF SIU HO-KAT

"It's okay (to speak with Hong Kong accent), but speaking like a native should be the ultimate goal (for every language learner)."

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in learning English. "I always encourage my students to learn what interests them," he said.

"It is a vicious cycle. If you are not good at English, you will never like it. But if you are good at it, you will fall in love with it," said Siu.

Siu was not good at English and did not like English while at secondary school.

It was only until he studied in the University of Hong Kong that his English was improved and he started to love it.

He said he made a lot of friends who are native English speakers when he was a university student. They helped him to improve his English pronunciation.

At that time, he learned from his students while giving tutorials. One of them was an American and the other two were from an international school. "I tutored them with their studies and they taught me English," he said.

In fact, he learned most of his foul words during his university time, mostly from his foreign friends and his tutorial students.

Foul words have also inspired him for writing a book to teach English with foul languages, because he had seen lots of students who swore with wrong use of foul words. However, the idea is not well-accepted that he turned his idea into writing a proper English learning book.

"I had always wanted to meet 'the one' who can teach me what to do if I want to speak like a native and write stylishly," said Siu. Yet

he added that he has never met "the one" in his life but he has been trying to be "the one" of his students.

He added that reading was also helpful in improving his language skills. He recommended one of his favourite writers, Bertand Russell, a British philosopher. "He writes about life, philosophy, war and many other topics. His language is beautiful. It is so stylish if one can write like him," he said.

His interest in English has also affected how he chose his career. Graduating with a law degree, Siu worked as a secondary school teacher.

"I have no interest in being a lawyer. I like legal studies but I don't like to work on it. It is too stiff," he said.

He considers his students as friends. His students always call him "Siu gal" which is the Chinese term for "roasted chicken" as his Chinese name has a similar pronunciation. "I don't mind because I also call my students by their nicknames," he said.

His interest in language also extends to Chinese. He said he also loves reading Chinese books which are written "stylishly", like *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Records of the Grand Historian*. "Chinese is very elegant," he said.

Despite being an English teacher, Siu said he still needs to improve his English. "I will continue studying as I have only a smattering of English," said Siu. ▣