THE HOMOS ... NYMS AND PHONES

I am sure the title of this article grabbed your attention. First, let me explain the reasoning behind the name of the title. It has been said that the English language is one of the most difficult languages to learn to speak. Making it more difficult are the homonyms, homophones and homographs. They all begin with the prefix homo.

Homonyms are words that have the same spelling and pronunciation but different meanings.

Homophones are words that have the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings.

Homographs are words that are spelled the same, but which have a different pronunciation and meaning. Now that I have you totally confused, we will move on.

Of course, growing up in English speaking households, our ears, eyes and brain recognize the sounds of various words and their meanings.

I am not a teacher, but I found it fun and fascinating to teach my own kids to talk and learn new words. So when do babies start communicating?

They say that at age 3 months that babies will listen and turn toward other voices, sounds and music that can be heard around the home. Many babies prefer the voices and music they heard while they were still in the womb. By the end of three months, babies begin “cooing.” Cooing is a happy, gentle, repetitive, singsong vocalization.

By the end of the sixth or seventh month, babies respond to their own names, recognize their native language, and use their tone of voice to tell you they're happy or upset. At 9 months, babies can understand a few basic words like "no" and "bye-bye."

To those who grow up in a non-English speaking home, the art of speaking English may be difficult. Does anyone know how many words are spelled alike, but have different meanings in the English language?

Just for fun, I wrote down a few and then thought of how difficult other countries and cultures must find it to speak and understand English. For instance here are a few words that could fool someone who was not well versed in English:

(1) The bandage was wound around the wound.

(2) The farm was used to produce produce.

(3) The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.

(4) We must polish the Polish furniture.

(5) He could lead if he would get the lead out.

(6) The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.

(7) Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present.

(8) A bass was painted on the head of the bass drum.

(9) When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.

(10) I did not object to the object.

(11) The insurance was invalid for the invalid.

(12) There was a row among the oarsmen about how to row.

(13) They were too close to the door to close it.

(14) The buck does funny things when the does are present.

(15) A seamstress and a sewer fell down into a sewer line.

(16) To help with planting, the farmer taught his sow to sow.

(17) The wind was too strong to wind the sail.

(18) After a number of injections my jaw got number.

(19) Upon seeing the tear in the painting I shed a tear.

(20) I had to subject the subject to a series of tests.

(21) How can I intimate this to my most intimate friend?

These are just a few of the inconsistencies we have in our dialect.

According to a report, 508 million people speak English. However, while English doesn't have the most speakers, it is the official language of more countries than any other language.

Surprise, surprise, the most widely spoken language on the planet is Mandarin with over one billion people speaking it. Speaking Mandarin can be really tough, because each word can be pronounced in four ways (or "tones"), and a beginner will invariably have trouble distinguishing one tone from another.

But if over a billion people could do it, so could you. Try saying hello! To say "hello" in Mandarin, say "Ni hao" (Nee HaOW). "Hao" is pronounced as one syllable, but the tone requires that you let your voice drop midway, and then raise it again at the end.

To me, speaking the English language is an honor and I believe that to live in this country, you should learn it and speak it.

Do you think English is a difficult language to speak? What were the first words your child spoke? Do you think people living in this country should speak English?

Let me know and I'll give you a Penny for Your Thoughts.