

## **Intonation and Stress as the Most Important Elements of a Good Accent**

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### **Abstract**

Accent is important in how speakers communicate their identities and how they fit into some social groups but not others. Accent is a common and variable aspect of L1 and L2 learning. As a result, native and non-native English teachers have benefits and disadvantages when it comes to speaking. This page explains how accents modify by the help of intonation, pacing, stress, and pitch, expanding vocabulary and work in the English-speaking world and how they relate to intelligibility, or how well listeners and speakers understand each other. Accents can be overstated in terms of assuming whether language learners have been successful and if non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) are competent, particularly in terms of teaching pronunciation. Accents cannot be disregarded in language teaching and learning due to their social significance, but they should not determine final success, either for learners or teachers.

**Keywords:** Language Teaching, Phonetics, accent, discrimination, intelligibility, pronunciation, social factors, intonation, stress.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Accent refers to how a language is spoken differently by native and non-native speakers. English, a world language with numerous speakers from many locations and socioeconomic classes, has many diverse accents. Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) are examples of reference accents. Other native and non-native accents are rarely recognized or socially stigmatized, whereas these are generally known and offer implicit norms for language acquisition and teaching. Although certain accents are more socially valuable than others, no accent is grammatically superior. Accents are not just distinctive of native English speakers, but also of English users all over the world. English accents vary depending on the situation. There is no American English accent, but there are several American English accents. The same is true in other places. Native accents in other inner-circle nations (such as the United Kingdom) vary by area or even town. Distinct accents of English occur and frequently have their own regional variants in the over 80 nations in the outer-circle countries (e.g., India, Singapore, Ghana), where English has an official, institutional function in multilingual cultures. Finally, numerous diverse English dialects exist among the nearly one billion speakers of English as a foreign language in expanding-circle nations where English is a school language but otherwise has no official governmental function.

Accents are linguistically relevant bundles of phonetic qualities. Native accent distinctions can be distinguished by characteristics such as the length of word-final stop consonants, vowel length, stopping behavior, and the degree of diphthongization. Similarly, the precise acoustic features of foreign accents vary depending on a variety of factors, including "age of L2 learning, length of residence in an L2-speaking country, gender, formal instruction, motivation, language

learning aptitude, and amount of native language (L1) use" (Piske, MacKay, & Flege, 2001, p. 191).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Accents are effective indicators of nativeness or non-nativeness, but it is vital to understand whether they reflect quality in teaching or shortcomings in linguistic or educational expertise. Do accents make a teacher easier or harder to understand? Is an accent synonymous with poor or illiterate English? This does not appear to be correct. Munro and Derwing (1995) found that speakers might be regarded to have a "heavy foreign accent" while yet being totally understandable, which indicates that listeners often understood every word, even when spoken with a heavy accent.

Concerns about accent can be particularly uncomfortable for NNESTs, who may feel a foreign accent reflects poorly on their achievement in language learning. Such teachers may also believe native accents should be a priority in the classroom. They may be also uncertain about the validity of their own accents for teaching and may be reluctant to teach pronunciation. Students learning English may prefer NESTs when they are learning conversation or pronunciation, but their preferences do not make a teacher more or less effective. Indeed, attitudes toward NNESTs tend to become more positive with greater familiarity with NNESTs, and as learners themselves become more proficient in the L2 (Selvi, 2014). NNESTs themselves may express less confidence about teaching pronunciation, but they are not alone in this. NESTs and NNESTs both repeatedly have expressed lack of confidence in teaching pronunciation. In addition, research into World Englishes over the past 40 years has lessened the power of standard British and American pronunciation as the only models for acceptable accents, even though the influence of these generally accepted native accents for teaching pronunciation remains firmly entrenched.

The commonality of accent in foreign language acquisition, as well as the fact that language learners may be very understandable with an accent, imply that achieving a native accent is not a realistic aim for most English learners. It's also unrealistic to talk of accent 'reduction' or 'removal'. Instead, increasing intelligibility should be a more attainable objective of teaching pronunciation. According to the Intelligibility Principle (Levis, 2005), L1 and L2 English speech must be comprehensible rather than match a specific native accent. Even if a native reference accent is necessary in a classroom setting, intelligibility should be the aim rather than replicating every tiny element of the accent.

Furthermore, an understanding of accent does not imply that pronunciation is irrelevant in the language classroom. Pronunciation, on the other hand, is a fundamental and inevitable aspect of effective communication and intersects with other language skills in a variety of ways. Intelligibility, and hence pronunciation, are vital in both speaking and listening. When native listeners listen to non-native speakers, non-natives must pronounce intelligibly and natives must adjust to non-native accents as they do to other native accents; and when non-native listeners listen to native speakers, native speakers must also be understandable. Intelligibility is essential in both directions. A further implication of the difference between accent and intelligibility is that promises of accent reduction typically sell false hope. Accent reduction implicitly promises that a change in accent (from what a speaker does now) will lead to greater success in communication (because of increased comprehensibility) and greater social acceptance. There is no evidence that either of these goals result from a change in accent. Increased comprehensibility can happen without a perceived change in accent, while social acceptance is dependent on many issues besides accent, such as how speakers are able to express their identity and become audible to listeners (Miller, 2003).

Foreign accents rarely disappear, but explicit pronunciation instruction can lead to improvement in intelligibility, even for seemingly fossilized learners. Analyses of pronunciation instruction across studies show that improvement is the norm (Lee, Jang, & Plonsky, 2014). However, the native accents of teachers do not guarantee nativeness. They do not even guarantee

improvement. Skillful instruction, however, can make a difference. In some cases, the use of technology may be particularly important in putting pronunciation instruction within the reach of all students. Using technology may even improve instruction by allowing students to be exposed to multiple input sources beyond just their native or non-native teacher and allowing them to direct their own learning.

Perhaps the most important pedagogical implication of a right view of accent is for how teachers are educated about the importance of pronunciation. Pronunciation is unavoidable in speaking a language, and must be addressed in language learning and teaching, but it is particularly prone to myths such as the superiority of a native accent and the possibility of achieving it. Such falsehoods are damaging to NESTs and NNESTs, promoting false superiority in one and false inferiority in the other. Levis, Link, Sonsaat, and Barriuso (2016) found that students in two pronunciation classes, one taught by a NEST and one by a NNEST, showed similar levels of improvement and rated the two teachers equivalently. This suggests that the supposed superiority of native accents in teaching pronunciation is merely a belief not a fact. Changing this belief will require widespread knowledge of which features of pronunciation are important, knowledge of how to teach pronunciation effectively, knowledge of the social power of accent, and knowledge of the significant strengths of non-native teachers.

## CONCLUSION

All teachers, native and non-native, have unique qualities that must be recognized and celebrated throughout teacher education. While this is becoming increasingly true, the importance of accent is often overlooked. Native instructors may be deemed qualified for teaching, particularly when it comes to teaching pronunciation, just because they are native. Although any teacher can be an effective guide to pronunciation acquisition, NNESTs may be exceptionally skilled at identifying their students' articulatory, perceptual, and attitudinal challenges, yet they may be regarded incompetent to teach pronunciation due to their accent. If NNESTs are understandable, effective L2 speakers, their speaking styles may make them an especially suitable model.

Far from being inadequate native speakers who speak poor English, many NNESTs are effective native users who understand how to adapt and develop, especially in traditionally difficult language qualities like pronunciation. Accents have traditionally been given much too much exclusionary power for NNESTs, overshadow teaching skills, experiences, and a learning link with their pupils. If we accept the concept that students should be given with suitable models, non-native instructors can be both a learning model and an intelligibility model. We should also not presume that since teachers have native accents, they can teach pronunciation. Pronunciation instruction requires intentional effort and rigorous training for all teachers.

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