**English Accents**

There are a few differences of grammar and spelling between American and British English, and rather more differences of vocabulary and idiom. Today, modern British English is heavily influenced by American English, so some contrasts are disappearing. Pronunciation is sometimes very different, but most American and British speakers can understand each other easily.

Many British people speak standard English, but with the typical accent of their part of the country. Other British people, however, combine standard English with a non-regional standard pronunciation. This (the so-called 'received pronunciation' or 'RP') is the pronunciation that has traditionally been used by a majority of British upper- and upper-middle-class people, though it has changed a good deal over the years. For a long time RP was considered more 'correct' than other accents, and its social dominance was reinforced by education and the media. This attitude is now changing, and there is less social prejudice in Britain than before against regional accents.

Standard British English is not, of course, the only standard form of English. American English also is a standard variety. In additions, there are accents from Australia and New Zealand, South Africa, etc.

For most learners, the best model is one or other of the two main standard varieties: British or American English. Neither of these is 'better' than the other, and they are both used and understood worldwide. The differences are generally unimportant and should not be a source of concern for English learners.

**What do you think of the following statements:**

I want to speak English without any accent from my own language.

Having the right accent is important for business success.

The Queen’s English accent is much better than an American accent.

In my country, an accent can tell us if someone is intelligent or not.

I would pay big money to have an accent that will help my career.

There are accents in my own language that I hate listening to.

Accents are one of the most difficult parts of understanding English.

I want to speak with an accent that doesn’t tell people where I’m from.

**Listen to the different accents and try to identify them:**

Germany, Ireland, Argentina, Italy, India, Australia, USA, China, Canada, Britain, Scotland

No. Country How do you understand it? Other

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

Do you ever think about or worry about your accent? In your mother tongue? In English?

Would you like to change your accent?

Do you think the British Queen’s English is the best accent in the world?

Do you think about your accent when you talk to native English speakers?

Are there many different regional variations in accent in your country?

Are there any prejudices toward accents in your country?

Do you think it would be better if the whole world English-speaking world used the same accent?

Why do people have different accents even in the same country?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| a. | Accents and other punctuation marks are bad for business. | T / F |
| b. | British English accents are best for business presentations. | T / F |
| c. | In business in the UK, an Indian accent is preferable to a regional one. | T / F |
| d. | The survey found prejudices towards accents in Britain. | T / F |
| e. | Speakers of Queen’s English are thought to be the most diligent. | T / F |
| f. | People with regional accents  are considered to be hardworking. | T / F |
| g. | People with regional accents will face prejudice in business. | T / F |
| h. | The survey suggests changing your accent to get ahead in business. | T / F |

**ODD WORD OUT:** Delete the incorrect or least likely word from each group of three in *italics*.

**Regional accents are 'bad for business'**

A recent *survey / study / answer* in the UK has found that regional accents can be “bad for business”. Professor Khalid Aziz, a specialist in communication for business executives, *asked / questioned / interrogated* people in high-level management to find out their *intonation / views / opinions* on regional accents. *He found / recovered / discovered* that non-English accents are better for business success in England. Speakers with an American, Scottish, Indian or Asian accent are preferred to speakers with a regional variation. Professor Aziz said: “Although it may not be [acceptable] to believe that accents matter *in days gone by / today / nowadays*, it is very *[clear] / [dear] / [obvious]* from our research that…prejudices still exist.”

The survey also *resorts / says / reports* that business people think speakers with Indian or Asian accents are more trustworthy and *reliable / honest / religious* than speakers with American or British accents. Professor Aziz said only 24 percent of the *exes* / *execs / executives* he questioned thought speakers with British regional accents were hardworking. He said that people with these accents “will *face / experience / head* prejudice in business”. His conclusion was that: “If you want to get *on / up / ahead* in business and don’t speak the Queen’s English, it is better to *sound / come across / come round* as if you are from America, Europe, India or…Scotland than from any English region.”