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Accents variety in English

Abstract. The article includes several main accents of English, their detailed analysis and examples of speech. The presented information might be especially interesting to linguists, accents coaches, actors (in case of struggling with imitating a certain accent) and language learners (in case of having difficulties imitating natives' speech). As languages are a part of everyone's day-to-day life, it is essential that a presenter is understood while giving a speech or that he/she understands everything the opponent says. Seemingly an insignificant part of learning a language, pronunciation plays a surprisingly important role. It is the basis, every language is built on, the essential skill any human being acquires. Without the right pronunciation or clear speech there will be no connection or understanding between the speaker and the audience. That is why the subject of the article stays topical nowadays. The result of the work is an analysis of miscellaneous speech manners and dialects scattered throughout the world. The article reviews different types of accents a person is likely to come across while communicating with English-speaking people. The complete analysis of speech manner, intonation and sounds gives an opportunity to explore the striking differences not only between accents in various countries, but also between speech in multiple districts of one state. This kind of variety makes the language so unique and lets it surprise even the most experienced learners.

Keywords: accent; English; pronunciation; speech; linguistics; phonetics; dialect; region; phonology; intonation; language; native; speaker; pauses; sounds

Introduction

It would not be an overestimation to say that English has become a global language both in the sphere of live communication and on the Internet. Being an official language of many countries, such as the USA, Britain, Canada, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and several Caribbean

countries, the English language is made a priority in a foreign-language teaching in many countries all over the world.

There exist a wide variety of cases in which the degree of language proficiency of the communicants does not play a big role (a snap talk in the street or chats in some social networks). On the other hand, an accent can greatly affect speech perception and lead to communication failure. Thus, the problems related to the study of different accents have been a key discussion point for many contemporary linguists.

The present paper is devoted to the study of various accent types in the modern English language. The materials studied for the purposes of the article relate to the contemporary media texts. As far as methodology is concerned, the methods of linguistic description and phonetic analysis of the spoken speech are paramount.

Results and discussion

First of all, it is essential to define the term "accent". Accent is a combination of phonetic, lexical and phraseological peculiarities of the speaker's pronunciation caused by the influence of the mother-tongue or the region the person comes from. It should be noticed that the linguistics sources emphasize that "the term refers to pronunciation only, and is thus distinct from dialect, which refers to grammar and vocabulary as well" [1, p. 3]. There are more than 160 accents all over the globe and none of them is considered the only correct option of pronunciation. Every accent has got its unique feature – a set of unspoken rules of pronouncing words. Accents vary so much that the UK alone has almost 40 different kinds of them. Sometimes there are even confusions due to this kind of extraordinary pronunciation. For instance, English-speakers from Northern England pronounce [th] combination as [f] instead of the commonly used interdental sound [θ]. Therefore, words like "three" or "that" are pronounced as /free/, or /fat/ and people tend to mix these phrases up when face such a weird pronunciation. And that is only a tiny part of what accents around the world sound like. Take American accent: there is General American accent, which is considered one of the most commonly used ones, and there are Southern US English speakers who pronounce the words like "pin" and "pen" similarly.

In most countries, there is a certain standard of speech, a so-called "prestigious" accent, alongside with miscellaneous accents associated with particular regions and even social classes. For example, there is Cockney, which is primarily used in London and its surroundings. It used to be a working class' accent, but nowadays it has developed much further and is considered a typical Londoners' accent. While people of high society like the Prime Minister or the Members of Parliament usually speak Received Accent, the kind of pronunciation typically taught to foreigners. And, of course, there are dialects which have contributed to every culture's development a lot as well. These are specific words or phrases only known to people from a certain area. If a person is not from Scotland, for instance, he/she will not be able to talk to a Scottish bartender, they simply might not understand each other. That often makes communication between people from different regions (even if they come from the same country) difficult. Basically, there is no guarantee, Irish or Scots will understand people from Texas or from Wales because their pronunciation is so different, they cannot always make out what the other participant of the dialog is talking about.

There is also a belief that non-native speakers understand each other much better than a native understands a non-native or vice-versa. And that is mostly true because a great number of languages have the same roots, they come from Latin or another ancient language, and it is quite understandable that such people will have quite similar constructions in their speech based on their mother-tongues. And this formula makes their communication much smoother and easier to understand, while it is

definitely much harder for native speakers to understand foreigners' speech. That is also a pretty important point to keep in mind when studying accents.

It is obvious that people from abroad have been learning English for centuries and there are also certain accents, which have been introduced to the society by foreigners. They have developed over the years, due to foreigners' inability to imitate native speakers' tone. Undoubtedly, that does not apply to everyone. Most people adapt to regional pronunciation quite easily, some of them are even impossible to be distinguished from the natives. And that is definitely an essential thing, since countries tend to open as the time goes and globalization is taking over, which makes unity and integration of all nations possible, introducing greater opportunities to everyone. There is an opinion that WSSE ("World Standard Spoken English") would almost certainly arise soon as most people are already 'multidialectal' to a greater or lesser extent [2].

Taking a look at Europe, there is the UK, but no such thing as the "British" accent. England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales all have their own accents. Irish and Scottish accents are especially different from the English pronunciation. What Americans usually define as "British" accent is basically a Received Pronunciation (RP), which is actually only used by 10 % of people in the UK. These are BBC speakers, the Prime Minister, the Queen and maybe some Members of Parliament. It differs most noticeably from General American pronunciation. For instance, in the Received Pronunciation there would be no [ɹ] sound in a phrase like "the northern fourth of the park", while in General American one would hear the sound quite distinctively [3].

As already mentioned, there are almost 40 regional accents within the UK, which is even more than in the US. One of the most recognisable is "Cockney", a typical Londoner's accent. Other very striking features are the loss of initial [h] (/ˈe ˈas an ˈard ˈeart/ = "he has a hard heart") and the frequent glottal stops in place of other stops in other accents (/i? ˈll taʔe a lo? o? ˈtime to se?le/ = "it'll take a lot of time to settle") [3]. The other major accent boundary in the UK separates the accents of the North from those of the South. People from all over the globe are also familiar with the English of Northern England through the speech of The Beatles. These accents can be identified fairly easily, because they make no distinction between the vowels [ʌ] and [ʊ]; both are pronounced like [ʊ], so that the words "look", and "luck" are homophones [3]. Scottish and Irish English share one feature with northern England English: the tense vowels [i], [u], [e] and [o] are not pronounced as diphthongs [3]. Moreover, these accents are like General American, and unlike most accents of England, in how they treat [ɹ] after vowels [3].

It should also be noted that what most people identify as American English is basically General American (GA) or Mainstream US English (MUSE) [4]. This is the accent of the Western hemisphere commonly used across the States and almost in all broadcasting shows/news etc. Unlike the UK government, most American presidents spoke regional varieties rather than General American English, which is considered an unofficial standard in the country. The "prestigious" accent also differs from those in Canada and Northern American cities. Accents spoken in Detroit or Chicago distinct from General American in the pronunciation of lax vowels. For example, the name of American baseball team "Chicago White Sox" is pronounced as [saks] in the Northern Cities accent, as compared to [saks] in Canadian English [4]. People from the North-East of the US are usually very easy to identify. The New York accent stands out as well, mostly due to its vowels. Standard Canadian English is not very different from General American and does not vary from region to region. The Southern US accent differs from General American a lot because, like the London accent, it has strikingly different vowels from other English accents. African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is a dialect associated with an ethnic group rather than a region [3]. The accent associated with this dialect is similar in many ways to Southern US accent, while the phonology, morphology and syntax of this variety have their own characteristic properties [5].

There is also a tendency in the Caribbean to make no distinction between [t] and [θ] or between [d] and [ð] [6]. Jamaican English also has quite striking intonation patterns.

Accents vary from island to island, so, turning to the Southern hemisphere, one cannot even count the number of intonation patterns spoken there. In Australia, New Zealand and Africa the most common pronunciation type is fairly close to the Received Pronunciation as they have tense vowels similar to those in the London accent, though the lax front vowels of Australian and New Zealand English differ from those in other accents [7].

It is a well-known fact that English as a second language is learned by millions of people throughout the world. Therefore, there are certain accents only spoken by non-native speakers, especially in regions previously colonised by Britain. These particular pronunciation conventions derive from phonology of the local languages. For example, in South Asia the alveolar consonants [t], [d], [n], and [l] tend to be replaced by retroflex consonants, which are common in the regional languages.

It should be mentioned that a lot of people wonder if it really matters whether a person has an accent or not. Basically, it depends on what his/her aim is. There is a false belief that accents make people more reserved and sometimes even shy as they think it is bad, they cannot speak the same way others do. However, it should not embarrass anyone. Having an accent has proven to have more pros than cons. Firstly, the speaker stands out, the person has more attention than ordinary speakers and that gives an opportunity to be heard. Secondly, it helps speakers get their own identity, their individuality and the image everyone has of them [8]. To illustrate this idea, we analyzed several video-podcasts. Different opinions on how accents help people emphasize their identity were recorded:

*"The accent might affect your identity in a way that it affects how you view yourself in a relation to yourself and in relations to others. It defines your possibilities in the future; it defines who you are; it defines how you think; it defines how do you view yourself with respect to others."*¹

*"During a break one of the faculty members came up to me and asked me where in America I was from. I gave him a blank stare and said "I'm not American!" and he said "Oh, but you've lived in the United States!". Again, I looked confused and responded "No!". I then began to think back to what I might have said that could have identified me as American. I asked him, and he told me "Oh, your [əɪz]! I'm American, so I recognized the accent!". At this point I laughed and told him I was born and raised in Canada, and aside from a few vacations I spent very little time in the United States. Although I was laughing outwardly, on the inside a part of me was quite concerned about this. **I do not want to sound American!**"*

In this example the speaker is upset and confused by the fact that a native American recognized American accent in her speech, while she was a Canadian. In this situation the speaker feels that her individuality is shattering.

What is more, accents can be advantageous in a variety of ways. First of all, accents break the ice. Everyone has experienced the strange feeling an individual gets while sitting beside new people having nothing to talk about. Then accent can be just the point to start with. Others hear the accent, get interested in the person, they want to know why he/she speaks differently, where the speaker comes from and that is the way a dialog starts:

¹ Sabra M. Your Accent, Your Identity.

S. Colbert: Can you teach me a real Irish accent?

S. Ronan: I could try! <...> I suppose you need to keep the sounds quite open, so every sort of sound is quite melodic and sing-songy. Start off by saying "/hau 'isa'gom | am 'stiven/" (How is it going? I'm Stephen!)

This extract demonstrates that accent can be an introductory topic of the discussion, an "ice-breaker". One series of "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" starts with the talk about the Irish accent of the guest – Saoirse Ronan.

Moreover, accents spark innovation, they can even give birth to new ideas. People with accents tend to be extremely individualistic and that gives them a chance to stand out. They are also usually quite independent and that makes them the centre of attention in any company. As an example, a piece of a famous program "The Graham Norton Show" can be adduced:

K. Bridges: /Mai sək'sə 'əsbɪn ɔrə/ (My success has been all right!)

G. Norton: Now, can you understand anything Kevin said, Lily?

L. Tomlin: No! (Laughing)

A comedian Kevin Bridges has a really heavy Scottish accent. This makes his interlocutors – an Irish comedian Graham Norton and an American actress Lily Tomlin – guess what he was talking about. All this creates a comic effect, and Kevin Bridges steals the show.

Another important thing is that every person is unique and trying to change will not solve the problem. Staying yourself is essential in finding balance between pronunciation and the right speech pace. There is a tendency among students to speak too fast or to mumble, to swallow some sounds. Stretching vowels can help with that. Taking control of the conversation pace is a very basic, but still a very important thing to keep in mind. Fast speech might be hard to follow. Therefore, maintaining pauses between words is essential. Of course, speaking Cockney or else might make one sound more attractive and set them apart, but it is very important that the speaker sets priorities and having a particular accent is not crucial here. Being clear and understandable should always be the priority.

Typically, it is only non-natives who have difficulties with sounds. When learning a second language, one may have difficulty with sounds that don't occur in their native language. For example, some languages have trilled r's, 'clicks' made with the tongue as air is taken in, or sounds made much farther back in the throat than English sounds. Surprisingly, though, the hardest sounds to learn may be those that are similar to sounds in their native language. It seems to be very difficult to overcome the tendency to keep using the familiar sounds from their native language. In this sense, native language causes 'interference' in one's efforts to pick up the new language.

Here are some examples of how various accents sound like and how they differ from each other.

1. Starting with the UK, the most well-known accent is Received Pronunciation. The posh type of pronunciation that only 10 % of people use.

EXAMPLE: /I 'urt my harm/ ("I hurt my arm")

2. Then goes the famous Cockney accent, mostly known for its use in the capital. It can be characterised by the loss of initial [h] (/e 'as an 'ard 'eart/ = "he has a hard heart") and the frequent glottal stops in place of other stops in other accents.

EXAMPLE: /i? 'll ta?e a lo? o' time to se?le/ ("it'll take a lot of time to settle").

3. The next accent can be heard in the UK, Midlands, especially in Birmingham. The unofficial name of the accent is “Brummie”. It can be identified easily because there is no difference between [ʌ] and [ʊ] – both are pronounced like [ʊ].

EXAMPLE: /Oi quoit loik it, oil giv it foiv/ ("I quite like it, I'll give it five")

/Berminggum is wun uv the Larges citays in the u-nyted kingdom/ ("Birmingham is one of the largest cities in the United Kingdom")

4. The main frontier between accents divides the UK into two areas: North and the South. While Cockney and Received Pronunciation are commonly used in the South, typical Northern accents are Mancunian, Cumbrian and Scottish [9].

EXAMPLE: /Awa' an bile yer heid/ ("Away and boil your head!")

/ar jə nɒt 'kʌmɪŋ/ ("Are you not coming?")

5. A very distinctive from all the other accents is Irish pronunciation. It tends to swallow all sounds and mix them together, emphasizing [ɹ] sound at the same time.

EXAMPLE: /Ha-ware-ya?;/ /Hawareya?/ ("How are you?")

6. Speaking about the US, there is also an invisible border in terms of accents between Northern and Southern states. While travelling through the South a person can hear a lot of “whistling” and soft sounds. States like Georgia or Tennessee are perfect examples of this [10].

EXAMPLE: /Aah have an aah-lash in mah aah/ ("I have an eyelash in my eye")

/Lem-me put mah feet up – Aah'm taard./ ("Let me put my feet up – I'm tired")

7. On the Northern board of the USA people tend to speak slower, the sounds are stretchy, it might even seem they put more effort into the speech. This kind of vocal intonation can be found in New York (state) and other Northern states like Illinois (especially Chicago), Massachusetts and Maine.

EXAMPLE: Monday → /Mun-dey;/ Tuesday → /Twos-dey/

"There's that guy from the office" becomes /Dhere's dat guy from de office/.

8. People from Hawaii also speak quite a peculiar accent. They usually speak a bit unclear, loosely and maybe even relaxed, which is a typical way of speech for inhabitants of an island.

EXAMPLE: /Run 'em haaaahd/ ("run it hard")

9. Next goes Canada. The manner of speech in this country is very much like accents of Northern American states with a little difference in pauses and intonation.

EXAMPLE: /oat and aboat/ ("out and about")

10. Australians speak quite vaguely, unclearly and leisurely. That can be explained by the pace of life at the continent. This type of speech has developed over the years due to the mix of British and American English brought to Australia at different time by immigrants and travellers [11].

EXAMPLE: /'jestədeɪ æ went tə ðə bi:tʃ/ənd æɪ hæd ə lɒt əv fən// ("Yesterday I went to the beach and I had a lot of fun")

11. New Zealand is located quite close to Australia, so it is natural that the manner of speech is basically alike. However, while Australians tend to speak more American English than its British version, New Zealanders typically sound more like British speakers [12].

EXAMPLE: /doint brung e hivvie sweetcoise/ ("don't bring a heavy suitcase")

12. There is also a form of accent that has developed in the past several centuries. It is called South African accents and is usually spoken by Afro-Americans or foreigners who have lived in Africa

for a long time. This accent is considered to sound more roughly, also stretchy and a little uneasy to understand.

EXAMPLE: "When somebody refers to a connection, it's a friend or a mate" → /wen 'sʌmbvði rə'fɜ:z tu ə kə'nekʃən/əts ə frend ə: ə məɪt/

Conclusion

To sum up, there is a great variety of accents in English. It can be presented in the form of the table:

Table

Accents in English

	Accent	Location
The UK		
1	RP (Received Pronunciation)	Most parts of Great Britain
2	Cockney	London and its surroundings
3	"Brummie"	Midlands (esp. Birmingham)
4	Northern accents	Manchester, Cumberland, Scotland
5	Irish	Northern Ireland
The USA		
6	Southern US	Southern US states (mostly Georgia and Tennessee)
7	Northern Us	Northern US states (mostly New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, Maine)
8	Hawaiian	Hawaii, Caribbean islands
Canada		
9	Canadian	Canada
Australia		
10	Australian	Australia and its islands
New Zealand		
11	New Zealand English	New Zealand
Africa		
12	African	South Africa

Such accent variety can be easily explained by its centuries-old history and the huge number of countries where people speak the language. Moreover, English is an international language so people of all nationalities study it. That is also one of the main factors that determine the direction of its future development and are the main source of accents origin.

More than that, as the analysis of factual materials demonstrates, accent can help people express their identity, capture attention of interlocutors, create a comic effect, break the ice. Thus, from the point of view of sociolinguistics, accent plays the role of a social marker that contributes to the individual features of a speaker or to giving any speech an expressive shade.

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Разнообразие акцентов в английском языке

Аннотация. Статья включает в себя анализ нескольких основных акцентов английского языка, а также примеры речи с данными акцентами. Информация, представленная в работе, может быть особо интересна лингвистам, специалистам по акцентам, актёрам (если не получается правильно симитировать определённый акцент) и всем, изучающим английский язык (в случае сложностей с произношением и имитацией речи носителей). Языки – неотъемлемая часть нашей жизни, и поэтому очень важно, чтобы слушатели понимали говорящего, а он, в свою очередь, мог правильно интерпретировать речь оппонентов. Роль произношения в изучении языка очень обманчива: кажется, что оно мало на что влияет, однако именно то, как человек произносит звуки, и является основой, на которой строится любой язык. Неспроста навык говорить одним из первых приобретает человек. Без правильного произношения и разборчивой речи невозможно установить контакт со слушателями. Именно поэтому тема статьи остаётся актуальной и по сей день. Результатом работы является подробный анализ разнообразных акцентов и манер речи, разбросанных по всему миру. Статья исследует различные типы речи и акцентов английского, с которыми можно столкнуться, общаясь с англоговорящими людьми. Полный анализ речи, интонаций и звуков позволяет разобраться в на первый взгляд несущественных различиях не только между акцентами разных стран, но и между акцентами соседних регионов внутри одного государства. Такое разнообразие есть то, что делает английский язык уникальным и позволяет ему удивлять даже самых искушённых знатоков.

Ключевые слова: акцент; английский; произношение; речь; лингвистика; фонетика; диалект; регион; фонология; интонация; язык; носитель; говорящий; паузы; звуки

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