



Students' Attitudes Towards Accents– A Qualitative Study

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Why are there different attitudes towards accents?

- Inherent Value Hypothesis → Incorrect
 - “Some languages are inherently more attractive than others”
- Social Connotation Hypothesis → Correct
 - Speakers have an Ideological Positioning
 - “Linguistic judgments are a result of complex social, political, and personal associations and prejudices”

What kinds of accents are the most difficult to understand?

1. “American Southern accents because they do not enunciate” (I7)
2. “Not a specific accent, but people who are still learning English” (I3)
3. “Asian and Indian: they are not European languages and may be more difficult to have an Americanized English accent” (I5)

According to you, what are good English accents and what makes them good?

Good English Accents	Bad English Accents
British (2 informants)—“Girls like them because it is mysterious” (I1)	German (1 informant) -- “It sounds harsh” (I2)
Australian (1 informant)— “Girls like them because it is mysterious” (I1)	Southern from the United States (1 informant) -- “Slang and shortening of words” (I6)
Italian (1 informant)—“Foreign and mysterious” (I2)	Boston from the United States (1 informant) – “It’s funny” (I7)
Mid-Western Accent (1 informant) “It’s familiar” (I6)	New York (1 informant) – “It’s annoying” (I7)

Do you have an accent when you speak English?

Informant	Rating of Personal Accent 1 (no accent) -10 (very thick accent)	Explanation of Accent
I1	3	“I talk fast and don’t enunciate. I have never been asked “What are you saying” but I have been told “You say that funny.”
I2	0	“I don’t think I have an accent but I notice my accent while traveling.”
I3	2 or 3	“I am made fun of for my Midwestern accent, but I can still be understood by others.”
I4	2	“I have an accent, but not very strong.”
I5	2	“I have an accent.”
I6	3	“I have an accent, but it’s not as strong as other accents in the United States.”
I7	2	“I have a Midwestern accent, but it’s not as strong as Northern Wisconsin or Milwaukee.”

Where have you heard these accents before?

Accent	Personal Exposure	Globalization (Telemarketing)	Media
Spanish	6	0	4
Irish	3	0	6
Indian	3	2	3

Conclusion

1. The familiarity with accents is increased through experiences such as traveling abroad and the high rate of globalization.
2. Linguistic attitudes are highly contextual.
3. Instruction on accent ideology is highly necessary. Curricular experiences at UWEC (ENGL 221) and learning languages help with exposure to different accents.

References

- Bauer, Laurie and Peter Trudgill. 1998. Language Myths. Penguin Books: London.
- Gass, S., and Varonis, E. 1984. The effect of familiarity on the comprehensibility of nonnative speech. Language learning, 34, 65-89.