



# Sensations Webinars for ENGLISH Teachers

Teaching English with graded,  
authentic, global resources



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# Accent representation in English language teaching: what teachers need to know

All attendees will receive a certificate of attendance and slides via email link 24 hours after the webinar.



# Why this topic?

Archer, G. (2022). **The Effects of Prestige Model Familiarity on UK-Based International Students' Perceptions of and Interactions with Diverse English Accents.**

Available at: [\(PDF\) The Effects of Prestige Model Familiarity on UK-Based International Students' Perceptions of and Interactions with Diverse English Accents | Gemma ARCHER - Academia.edu](#)





# Overview

## 1. The problem

- What's happening in ELT?
- Consequences for our students' perception and production

## 2. Solutions and examples



# To communicate effectively, what skills would these medical professionals need?



Image source:  
The Guardian (2016)



# What's the problem?



**The majority of ELT resources still rely on prestige model accents**  
(Kiczkowiak, 2021).



# Consequences?



- **Cognitive cost:** Unfamiliar accents require increased processing time in the brain (Adank & McQueen, 2007; Adank et al, 2009; Harding, 2008).
- The more familiar an accent is, the easier it is to comprehend (Smith & Bisazza, 1988; Ballard & Winke 2016).
- We prefer what we are familiar with!



# The consequences of lack of exposure to diverse Englishes

1. Learners are exposed only to prestige L1 models and **lack awareness** of other varieties.

2. Lack of familiarity and exposure can **reduce comprehension** & increase communication breakdowns (Gass & Varonis, 1984; Flowerdew, 1994; Major et al, 2002).

3. Learners can develop communication **anxiety** and avoid certain groups of English speakers where potentially embarrassing misunderstandings may occur.

4. Learners internalise **negative beliefs** about 'difficult' accents and their speakers (Dalton-Puffer et al, 1997; Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2010; Moyer, 2014; Abeywickrama, 2013; Archer, 2018; Archer, 2022) and can be **suspicious** about unfamiliar varieties (Scales et al, 2006).





# Match the consequences (1-5) to the learner statement (A-E)

**1. Beliefs**   **2. Suspicions**   **3. Tolerance**   **4. Comprehension**   **5. Confidence**

- a. I **don't want to speak to** them, they are from X, they don't speak properly there.
- b. I **know** that 'X English' is the only 'proper' type of English to learn.
- c. I'm **worried** I won't understand them because of their accent.
- d. I really **struggle** to understand them because of their accent.
- e. I get really **frustrated** listening to them; they are so difficult to understand.





## Answers

- a. **Suspicion:** I **don't want to speak to** them, they are from X, they don't speak properly there.
- b. **Beliefs:** I **know** that 'X English' is the only proper type of English to learn.
- c. **Confidence** I'm **worried** I won't understand them because of their accent.
- d. **Comprehension** I really **struggle** to understand them because of their accent.
- e. **Tolerance:** I get really **frustrated** listening to them; they are so difficult to understand.



# What can suspicion and lack of tolerance look like in reality?



**Ratna Juita** · 2nd

TEDx Speaker Well-Being Strategist ...

1d · Edited ·

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“She is Indonesian, she is too slow.”

“Her English can’t make it.”

“Did you speak English? I can’t understand what you say!”

Those are comments I received when I first came to work in Singapore.

It was hurtful to hear and made me question my self-worth.

These negative biases are not only hurtful but also detrimental to my personal and professional growth.

I was struggling a lot with low self-esteem and imposter syndrome.

Based on the negative biases I received and disempowering beliefs that don’t serve me well. It created so much emotional pain!

When I learn to embrace my imperfections, recognise my inner critics, acknowledge its presence and brave enough to step into my space to chart the future on my own terms, better things are unfolding :

◆ Transforming my fear into fuel that drives me to make a better life for myself - spoke on TEDx, featured by CNA 938 & recognised as LinkedIn Top Voice

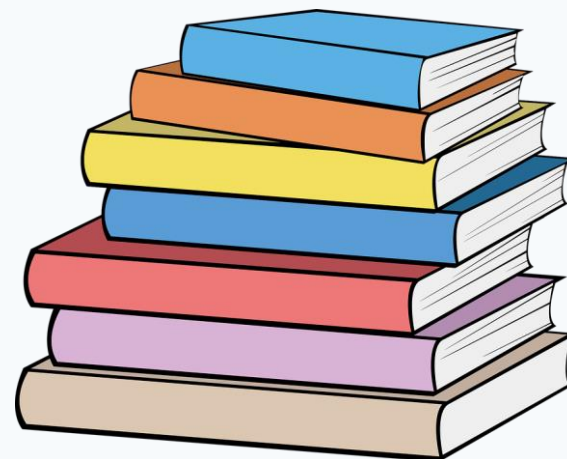
**Have you experienced or observed lack of tolerance?**



# A final consequence: Setting students up to fail?

Content in textbooks and materials are often made up of native speaker features. E.g., exercises in

- connected speech
- assimilation
- vowel reduction, and
- prestige model vowel replication (Kiczkowiak, 2021).



→ These features are **not** necessary for intelligible L2-L2 English communication.

→ Encouraging production of native-like English is setting (most) learners up to fail.



# The reality ratio

Approx. 2 billion global users of English (Crystal, 2019)

3:1 ratio: L1-L2 speakers

- Likelihood of students meeting and conversing with L1 prestige model speaker: **low**
- Likelihood of students meeting and conversing with L2 speaker: **high**





# Solutions?

**1. Encourage reflection on L1 accent diversity**



# Use ss' L1 diversity to introduce English accent diversity (Walker, 2017)

## Figure 1. Accents in your own language (discuss with your partner)

1. How many different accents of Spanish can you think of? More than five? More than 10? Make a list.
2. Which two Spanish accents do you like best?
3. Which accent do you like least?
4. Look at the following adjectives:

*educated*

*competent*

*authoritative*

*unfriendly*

*unreliable*

*humorous*

*intelligent*

*hard-working*

*ambitious*

Which three adjectives do you associate most with each of the following accents: Andalucía, Aragon, Catalonia, Madrid, Argentina, Chile

## Figure 2. Accents in English

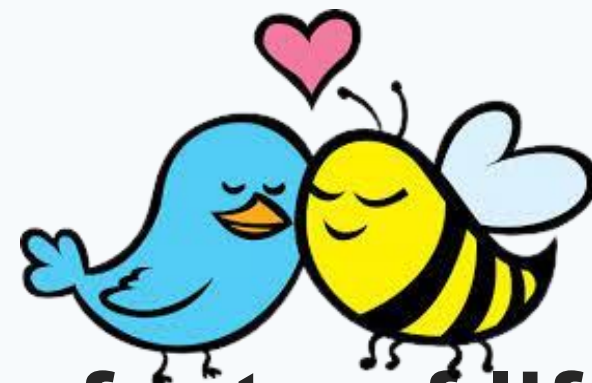
- a. Look at the following statements about learners' accents in English. On a scale from 1 (Totally agree) to 5 (Totally disagree), decide how you feel about each statement.

1. We should all learn to speak English with the same accent.
2. The best accent for students to imitate is an RP (BBC) English accent.
3. It's easier to understand native speakers than non-native speakers of English.
4. A bad accent is like wearing shabby clothes to a job interview – it gives the wrong impression.

- b. Now compare your answers with your colleagues. If you disagree, try to persuade them to think like you.



# Solutions?



**2. Be realistic about the 'linguistic facts of life'  
(Lippi-Green, 1997)**



# The 'linguistic facts of life'

1. A likely reason for finding X accent more challenging, is a lack of familiarity/exposure to it' (Flowerdew, 1994; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Major et al, 2002).
2. Nothing in linguistics supports the idea that certain accents are inherently more intelligible than others (Walker, 2017).
3. It's not impossible to achieve L2 native likeness in adulthood, but it is unlikely (Levis, 2020).





# Solutions?

**3. Provide realistic and relatable accent models**



# Near-peer role models:

*Proof of what's possible* (Curry, 2019)

'... near peers are a powerful device for the pursuit of the ideal L2 self, where the success of others can help us see such a future for ourselves – a possible future, a real future. Therefore, to use the ideal L2 self as a motivational tool, near-peer role models are a prerequisite.'

Near-peer role models in the classroom can support

- the move away from L1 centric models and goals;
- increased learner autonomy rather than teacher dependence;
- increased motivation (Kirson & Lee, 2004).

## **Near-peers in the classroom?**

Ask students to investigate a famous near-peer from their own L1 background.



**Solutions?**

# **Supporting students' production**



# Focus on key features for international intelligibility: The Lingua Franca Core (Jenkins, 2000)

<b>Core features (essential to ELF intelligibility)</b>	<b>Non-core features (not damaging to ELF intelligibility)</b>	<b>Non-core features (damaging to ELF intelligibility)</b>
Most consonants	Dental fricatives	Vowel reduction
Initial and medial consonant clusters	Word stress	Weak forms
Vowel length (quantity)	Stress timing	Some features of connected speech
Nuclear stress placement	Tones (pitch movement)	

Walker (2020)



**Solutions?**

# **Supporting students' perception**



## Guided-discovery of diverse accent features (Patsko, 2015)

1. Listen for 'gist' - a general understanding.
2. Listen for detail: What's the problem the speaker mentions?
3. Listen again and
  - transcribe a specific phrase, or
  - identify when you hear a word/ a specific sound/ feature.  
(\*this becomes proof students CAN hear and understand)
4. Listen again - did you hear any further examples of this feature?
5. Reflect: was this easy? Difficult? Useful?



# To sum up: What do we need to know?

**There are negative consequences due to lack of exposure to diverse Englishes, these can include:**

- Reduced comprehension.
- Increased communication breakdowns.
- Increased communication anxiety.
- Internalisation of negative beliefs about diverse Englishes.
- Reduced tolerance to diverse varieties.

**BUT!**

With exposure, guidance, and reflection in the classroom, students can become more tolerant, more understanding and more accepting of the rich diversity of global Englishes.



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# Thank you!



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