

1. Accents

This week's lesson is based on a conversation between a British person and a Brazilian on the subject of different accents in spoken English.

Level

Pre-intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level A2-B1 and above)

How to use the lesson

1. You could begin the lesson by asking the students about different regional accents in their country. How many distinct regional accents are there? Can they say anything about those accents in English (rather than merely imitate them)? Introduce the idea of a 'model' accent: is there such a thing in their country, and if so, do they think it right that one accent should be seen as more desirable than any other? When it comes to speaking English, how strong an accent do they think they have? Would they like to soften their accent, or even lose it completely? Ask them to justify their answers. How many different accents can they distinguish among the world's native speakers of English? Do they have a favourite among those accents, and if so, why do they like it? Can they think of any famous people who speak English with an accent they find particularly attractive/unattractive/strange?
2. Give your students five to ten minutes to read through the conversation on Worksheet A, encouraging them to look up new vocabulary. Tell them they are going to answer a series of questions on the text but that they shouldn't write anything down at this stage.
3. Divide the students into pairs and hand out Worksheet B. Ask the students to work together to complete Exercises 1 and 2, in which they have to answer two different kinds of comprehension questions.
4. Check answers in open class. You could also ask the students if they identified with any of the feelings expressed by Marina, and what they thought of Dave's opinions about foreign accents.
5. Ask the students to put away Worksheets A and B or to temporarily hand them back to you. Then, keeping the students in pairs, hand out Worksheet C, which contains the text from Worksheet A, and give them another ten minutes for the gap-fill exercise in which they have to complete the missing words. If the students cannot remember what the words are, encourage them to try to work them out from the context of the sentence. You might also want to point out that many of the words feature in the glossary (or, to make it more difficult, you could ask the students not to use their glossaries).
6. Check answers in open class.

Answers:

Exercise 1

1. T 2. T 3. F 4. F 5. D 6. F 7. T 8. F 9. T 10. F

Exercise 2

1. Six years.
2. Regional accents.
3. He likes them, because he finds them interesting.
4. Scottish, Welsh, Geordie, Liverpool, London, American, South African, Australian.
5. Whether or not people can understand them when they speak.
6. He seems to suggest that 50 years ago most BBC presenters spoke 'like the Queen' – but says this isn't true anymore, as now they have lots of different regional accents.
7. His explanation is that the people in question probably spend all their time with others who speak exactly the way they do, so a different accent, such as Marina's, would be a bit of a shock.
8. The 'model British accent'. Dave appears to believe that as long as it can be understood, no accent should be regarded as worse than any other.

Exercise 3

1. wish 2. mean 3. sound 4. mouth 5. native 6. honestly 7. loads 8. Welsh
9. et cetera 10. non 11. mild 12. Queen 13. were 14. thing 15. perfectly
16. person 17. spend 18. exactly 19. shock 20. fault

2. Related Websites

Send your students to these websites, or just take a look yourself.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/newsid_6280000/newsid_6283100/6283182.stm

A BBC *Newsround* forum (2007) asking 'Which accent sounds the best?', with opinions from children and young teenagers. Challenging for pre-intermediate level.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/newsid_4700000/newsid_4709400/4709464.stm

Also from BBC *Newsround* (2006), an article suggesting that dogs can pick up a 'voice' similar to their owner's regional accent.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/4153102.stm

A forum on the BBC website asking 'How do you feel about regional accents?', with opinions from adults. Intermediate level and above.

<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/>

The British Library's 'Sounds Familiar?' project, with audio recordings of numerous different British accents. The recordings accessed via the map of Britain appear with transcripts, and students of all levels might enjoy the extent to which the spoken words differ from what they probably expect to hear.