

e-lesson

Week starting: October 18, 2010

1. Accents

This week's lesson is based on a conversation between an American 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 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 favorite 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 Maria, 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. Give them another ten minutes for the fill-in-the-blanks exercise, in which they have to complete the missing words. If the students cannot remember what the words are, encourage them to try to figure 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. Southern, Upper Midwestern, Eastern, Hawaiian, Bostonian, British, South African, Australian.
5. Whether or not people can understand them when they speak.
6. He seems to suggest that forty years ago, most broadcasters had the same, standard American accent, with not even mild regional accents, 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 Maria's, would be a shock.
8. The "model American 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. regional
8. Southern 9. countries 10. non 11. mild 12. exactly 13. were 14. thing 15.
perfectly 16. person 17. spend 18. slightly 19. shock 20. fault

2. Related websites

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

<http://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/americanvarieties/map/map.html>

A PBS interactive quiz on regional accents in the USA, with sound clips. Also see related links on the left. Accessible to pre-intermediate level.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6883700>

An NPR broadcast about US regional accents: audio and written transcript. Challenging for pre-intermediate level.

<http://accent.gmu.edu/>

The "Speech Accent Archive" from George Mason University in the USA, with samples of English accents around the world. Accessible to pre-intermediate level.