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## **The Breaking News English.com Resource Book**

“1,000 Ideas & Activities For Language Teachers”

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## **Regional accents are 'bad for business'**

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**30 December, 2005**

## **THE ARTICLE**

### **Regional accents are 'bad for business'**

A recent survey in the UK has found that regional accents can be “bad for business”. Professor Khalid Aziz, a specialist in communication for business executives, questioned people in high-level management to find out their opinions on regional accents. He discovered that non-English accents are better for business success in England. Speakers with an American, Scottish, Indian or Asian accent are preferred to speakers with a regional variation. Professor Aziz said: “Although it may not be [acceptable] to believe that accents matter nowadays, it is very [clear] from our research that...prejudices still exist.”

The survey also reports that business people think speakers with Indian or Asian accents are more trustworthy and reliable than speakers with American or British accents. Professor Aziz said only 24 percent of the executives he questioned thought speakers with British regional accents were hardworking. He said that people with these accents “will face prejudice in business”. His conclusion was that: “If you want to get ahead in business and don’t speak the Queen’s English, it is better to sound as if you are from America, Europe, India or...Scotland than from any English region.”

## WARM-UPS

**1. MY ACCENT:** In pairs / groups, talk about your accent. Do you like it? Has it changed since you were a child? Do you think it's a good accent to succeed in business?

**2. WORLD ENGLISHES:** In pairs / groups, talk about the following English accents. What are your experiences of listening to these accents? Which do you like or dislike?

- Queen's English
- Regional British accents
- Standard American
- Regional American accents
- Australian English
- Chinese English
- Spanish English
- French English
- Russian English
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**3. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

*Surveys / business managers / regional accents / high level / prejudices / trustworthiness / Indian accents / executives / Queen's English / Scotland*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

**4. SPEECHES:** Talk with your partner(s) about how important the following are when giving a speech or a presentation in (1) English and (2) your own language:

- Accent
- Perfect pronunciation
- Speed of speech
- Use of slang
- The volume of your voice
- Intonation
- Pauses
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**5. ACCENT OPINIONS:** Talk about the following in pairs/ groups. Do you agree with them?

- a. I want to speak English without any accent from my own language.
- b. Having the right accent is important for business success.
- c. The Queen's English accent is much better than an American accent.
- d. In my country, an accent can tell us if someone is intelligent or not.
- e. I would pay big money to have an accent that will help my career.
- f. There are accents in my own language that I hate listening to.
- g. Accents are one of the most difficult parts of understanding English.
- h. I want to speak with an accent that doesn't tell people where I'm from.

**6. ACCENT:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with accents. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

## BEFORE READING / LISTENING

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. Accents and other punctuation marks are bad for business. T / F
- b. British English accents are best for business presentations. T / F
- c. In business in the UK, an Indian accent is preferable to a regional one. T / F
- d. The survey found prejudices towards accents in Britain. T / F
- e. Speakers of Queen's English are thought to be the most diligent. T / F
- f. People with regional accents are considered to be hardworking. T / F
- g. People with regional accents will face prejudice in business. T / F
- h. The survey suggests changing your accent to get ahead in business. T / F

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| a. survey      | says           |
| b. specialist  | asked          |
| c. questioned  | succeed        |
| d. variation   | discrimination |
| e. prejudices  | diligent       |
| f. reports     | come across    |
| g. trustworthy | difference     |
| h. hardworking | expert         |
| i. get ahead   | study          |
| j. sound       | honest         |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| a. a specialist in communication       | accents are more trustworthy |
| b. find out their opinions             | believe that accents matter  |
| c. non-English accents are better for  | as if you are from America   |
| d. it may not be acceptable to         | executives he questioned     |
| e. it is very clear from our research  | on regional accents          |
| f. speakers with Indian or Asian       | ahead in business            |
| g. only 24 percent of the              | that prejudices still exist  |
| h. people with these accents will face | for business executives      |
| i. If you want to get                  | business success in England  |
| j. it is better to sound               | prejudice in business        |

## WHILE READING / LISTENING

**ODD WORD OUT:** Delete the incorrect or least likely word from each group of three in *italics*.

### Regional accents are 'bad for business'

A recent *survey / study / answer* in the UK has found that regional accents can be "bad for business". Professor Khalid Aziz, a specialist in communication for business executives, *asked / questioned / interrogated* people in high-level management to find out their *intonation / views / opinions* on regional accents. *He found / recovered / discovered* that non-English accents are better for business success in England. Speakers with an American, Scottish, Indian or Asian accent are preferred to speakers with a regional variation. Professor Aziz said: "Although it may not be [acceptable] to believe that accents matter *in days gone by / today / nowadays*, it is very [clear] / [dear] / [obvious] from our research that...prejudices still exist."

The survey also *resorts / says / reports* that business people think speakers with Indian or Asian accents are more trustworthy and *reliable / honest / religious* than speakers with American or British accents. Professor Aziz said only 24 percent of the *exes / execs / executives* he questioned thought speakers with British regional accents were hardworking. He said that people with these accents "will *face / experience / head* prejudice in business". His conclusion was that: "If you want to get *on / up / ahead* in business and don't speak the Queen's English, it is better to *sound / come across / come round* as if you are from America, Europe, India or...Scotland than from any English region."

## **LISTENING**

Listen and fill in the spaces.

### **Regional accents are 'bad for business'**

A recent survey in the UK has found that \_\_\_\_\_ accents can be “bad for business”. Professor Khalid Aziz, a specialist in communication for business executives, \_\_\_\_\_ people in high-level management to find out their opinions on regional accents. He \_\_\_\_\_ that non-English accents are better for business success in England. Speakers with an American, Scottish, Indian or Asian accent are preferred to speakers with a regional \_\_\_\_\_. Professor Aziz said: “Although it may not be [acceptable] to believe that accents \_\_\_\_\_ nowadays, it is very [clear] from our research that...prejudices still \_\_\_\_\_.”

The survey also \_\_\_\_\_ that business people think speakers with Indian or Asian accents are more trustworthy and \_\_\_\_\_ than speakers with American or British accents. Professor Aziz said only 24 percent of the executives he questioned \_\_\_\_\_ speakers with British regional accents were hardworking. He said that people with these accents “will \_\_\_\_\_ prejudice in business”. His conclusion was that: “If you want to get \_\_\_\_\_ in business and don’t speak the Queen’s English, it is better to \_\_\_\_\_ as if you are from America, Europe, India or...Scotland than from any English \_\_\_\_\_.”

## AFTER READING / LISTENING

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'high' and 'level'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. ODD WORD OUT:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. STUDENT "ACCENT" SURVEY:** In pairs / groups, write down questions about accents and how important they are in business.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

**6. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- can
- high
- England
- preferred
- acceptable
- exist
- trustworthy
- 24 percent
- face
- conclusion
- ahead
- sound

## **DISCUSSION**

### STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. Do you ever think about or worry about your accent?
- c. How important do you think your accent is when doing business?
- d. Would you consider paying to change your accent if you thought you could have a more successful career?
- e. Do you think the British Queen's English is the best accent in the world?
- f. What accents have you had difficulties in understanding?
- g. Do you think a British or American accent is better in business?
- h. Do you think about your accent when you talk to native English speakers?
- i. Would you like to make a speech in English while trying to use a different accent?
- j. How do you think English people will feel about Professor Aziz's survey?

### STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Would you like to change your accent?
- d. Are there many different regional variations in accent in your country?
- e. Are there any prejudices toward accents in your country?
- f. Do you think there should be laws against accent discrimination?
- g. Do you think it would be better if the whole world English-speaking world used the same accent?
- h. Why do people have different accents even in the same country?
- i. Do you want to get ahead in business?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

**AFTER DISCUSSION:** Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

## SPEAKING

**BUSINESS ACCENT:** In pairs / groups, agree on a suitable accent for use in TV commercials that advertise the products in the table. You must choose a different accent for each product. Agree whether it is better for a male or female voice to be used. Agree on the three most important keywords for each product.

PRODUCT	ACCENT	M / F	KEYWORDS
Beer			
An action movie			
A vacation in Tahiti			
Computer software			
Chocolate			
Car insurance			
A diamond ring			

Change partners and tell you new partner(s) what you decided with your old partner(s).

Talk and compromise to make sure the information in your tables is the same.

## **HOMEWORK**

**1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

**2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find more information on English accents. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

**3. SPEECH:** Make a poster outlining the things that are important to make an effective speech. Focus on the voice. Show your posters to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar ideas?

**4. LETTER:** Write a letter to Khalid Aziz and tell him what you think of his survey. Ask him for advice on how to be a better speaker. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did everyone write similar things?

## ANSWERS

### TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F      b. F      c. T      d. T      e. F      f. F      g. T      h. T

### SYNONYM MATCH:

- |                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| a. survey      | study          |
| b. specialist  | expert         |
| c. questioned  | asked          |
| d. variation   | difference     |
| e. prejudices  | discrimination |
| f. reports     | says           |
| g. trustworthy | honest         |
| h. hardworking | diligent       |
| i. get ahead   | succeed        |
| j. sound       | come across    |

### PHRASE MATCH:

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| a. a specialist in communication       | for business executives      |
| b. find out their opinions             | on regional accents          |
| c. non-English accents are better for  | business success in England  |
| d. it may not be acceptable to         | believe that accents matter  |
| e. it is very clear from our research  | that prejudices still exist  |
| f. speakers with Indian or Asian       | accents are more trustworthy |
| g. only 24 percent of the              | executives he questioned     |
| h. people with these accents will face | prejudice in business        |
| i. If you want to get                  | ahead in business            |
| j. it is better to sound               | as if you are from America   |

### ODD WORD OUT:

#### Regional accents are 'bad for business'

A recent *survey* / *study* / ~~answer~~ in the UK has found that regional accents can be "bad for business". Professor Khalid Aziz, a specialist in communication for business executives, *asked* / *questioned* / ~~interrogated~~ people in high-level management to find out their *intonation* / *views* / *opinions* on regional accents. He *found* / ~~recovered~~ / *discovered* that non-English accents are better for business success in England. Speakers with an American, Scottish, Indian or Asian accent are preferred to speakers with a regional variation. Professor Aziz said: "Although it may not be [acceptable] to believe that accents matter ~~in days gone by~~ / *today* / *nowadays*, it is very [clear] / [~~dear~~] / [obvious] from our research that...prejudices still exist."

The survey also ~~resorts~~ / *says* / *reports* that business people think speakers with Indian or Asian accents are more trustworthy and *reliable* / *honest* / ~~religious~~ than speakers with American or British accents. Professor Aziz said only 24 percent of the ~~exes~~ / *execs* / *executives* he questioned thought speakers with British regional accents were hardworking. He said that people with these accents "will *face* / *experience* / ~~head~~ prejudice in business". His conclusion was that: "If you want to get *on* / ~~up~~ / *ahead* in business and don't speak the Queen's English, it is better to *sound* / *come across* / ~~come round~~ as if you are from America, Europe, India or...Scotland than from any English region."