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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 conducted on business managers in the UK has revealed that certain regional accents can be “bad for business”. Professor Khalid Aziz, a specialist in communication for executives and high fliers, carried out the survey to gauge the degree to which prejudices against accents exists. He discovered that non-English accents are more conducive to commercial success in Britain. Speakers with an American, Scottish, Indian or Asian accent, be it in a live presentation or in television commercials, are preferred to speakers with even the slightest twang of a regional variation. Professor Aziz asserts: “Although it may not be politically correct to believe that accents matter nowadays, it is very apparent from our research that popular prejudices still exist.”

According to the survey, business people with Indian or Asian accents are considered to be more diligent, trustworthy and reliable than speakers with American or British accents. Professor Aziz reported that only 24 percent of the executives he questioned regarded speakers with accents from the British cities of Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Newcastle as being hardworking. He asserted 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.” He added: “The key is to avoid using localized vocabulary, which others may not recognize.”

WARM-UPS

1. MY ACCENT: In pairs / groups, talk about your accent. Do you like it? Has it changed over the years? 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 fliers / prejudices / commercial success / Indian accents / diligence / Queen's English / vocabulary

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 colloquialisms
- Volume / audibility
- Intonation
- Pauses
- Other _____

5. ACCENT OPINIONS: Talk about the following in pairs/ groups. To what extent do you agree with them?

- a. I want to speak English without any accent from my own language.
- b. Having the right accent is essential 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 be trained 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. Non-UK English accents are not good for business presentations. T / F
- b. A survey gauged the extent to which prejudices exist towards accents. T / F
- c. In business in the UK, an Indian accent is preferable to a regional one. T / F
- d. The survey found that prejudices were very popular in Britain. T / F
- e. Speakers of Queen's English are considered to be the most diligent. T / F
- f. People with accents from Liverpool are considered to be hardworking. T / F
- g. The survey suggests changing your accent to get ahead in business. T / F
- h. The key is to avoid using localized vocabulary. T / F

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

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| a. conducted | crux |
| b. gauge | favorable |
| c. prejudice | contended |
| d. conducive | conscientious |
| e. twang | encounter |
| f. diligent | bigotry |
| g. asserted | ascertain |
| h. face | hint |
| i. get ahead | carried out |
| j. key | excel |

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

- | | |
|--|--|
| a. gauge the degree to which | are considered to be more diligent |
| b. non-English accents are more | correct to believe that accents matter |
| c. speakers with even the slightest | ahead in business |
| d. it may not be politically | using localized vocabulary |
| e. popular | prejudices against accents exists |
| f. people with Indian or Asian accents | conducive to commercial success |
| g. people with these accents will face | as if you are from America |
| h. If you want to get | prejudices still exist |
| i. it is better to sound | prejudice in business |
| j. The key is to avoid | twang of a regional variation |

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 *conducted / carried out / constructed* on business managers in the UK has revealed that certain regional accents can be “bad for business”. Professor Khalid Aziz, a specialist in communication for executives and *high fliers / go-getters / big punchers*, carried out the survey to *plague / gauge / assess* the degree to which *prejudices / bigotry / profanity* against accents exists. He discovered that non-English accents are more conducive to commercial success in Britain. Speakers with an American, Scottish, Indian or Asian accent, be it in a live presentation or in television commercials, are preferred to speakers with even the slightest *twig / hint / twang* of a regional variation. Professor Aziz asserts: “Although it may not be politically correct to believe that accents matter nowadays, it is very *perspicacious / clear / apparent* from our research that popular prejudices still exist.”

According to the survey, business people with Indian or Asian accents are considered to be more *derogatory / conscientious / diligent*, trustworthy and reliable than speakers with American or British accents. Professor Aziz reported that only 24 percent of the executives he *questioned / asked / interrogated* regarded speakers with accents from the British cities of Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Newcastle as being hardworking. He *asserted / contended / compounded* that people with these accents “will *encounter / face / scalp* 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 *come across / sound / come down* as if you are from America, Europe, India or...Scotland than from any English region.” He added: “The *key / crux / padlock* is to avoid using localized vocabulary, which others may not recognize.”

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Regional accents are 'bad for business'

A recent survey _____ on business managers in the UK has revealed that certain regional accents can be "bad for business". Professor Khalid Aziz, a specialist in communication for executives and _____, carried out the survey to gauge the degree to which _____ against accents exists. He discovered that non-English accents are more conducive to commercial success in Britain. Speakers with an American, Scottish, Indian or Asian accent, _____ live presentation or in television commercials, are preferred to speakers with even the slightest _____ of a regional variation. Professor Aziz asserts: "Although it may not be politically correct to believe that accents matter nowadays, it is very _____ from our research that popular prejudices still exist."

According to the survey, business people with Indian or Asian accents are considered to be more _____, trustworthy and reliable than speakers with American or British accents. Professor Aziz reported that only 24 percent of the executives he questioned _____ speakers with accents from the British cities of Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Newcastle as being hardworking. He _____ that people with these accents "will face prejudice in business". His conclusion was that: "If you want to _____ 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 _____." He added: "The key is to avoid using _____ vocabulary, which others may not recognize."

AFTER READING / LISTENING

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

- 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:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| • certain | • diligent |
| • fliers | • 24 percent |
| • gauge | • face |
| • conducive | • conclusion |
| • twang | • sound |
| • popular | • key |

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 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 most desirable 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. Are you conscious of 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 people from the cities mentioned in the article will feel about Professor Aziz's findings?

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 as there are for sex and race 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. Does the phrase "popular prejudices" sound strange to you?
- 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. T c. T d. F e. F f. F g. T h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| a. conducted | carried out |
| b. gauge | ascertain |
| c. prejudice | bigotry |
| d. conducive | favorable |
| e. twang | hint |
| f. diligent | conscientious |
| g. asserted | contended |
| h. face | encounter |
| i. get ahead | excel |
| j. key | crux |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|---|--|
| a. gauge the degree to which prejudices | against accents exist |
| b. non-English accents are more | conducive to commercial success |
| c. speakers with even the slightest | twang of a regional variation |
| d. it may not be politically | correct to believe that accents matter |
| e. popular | prejudices still exist |
| f. people with Indian or Asian accents | are considered to be more diligent |
| g. people with these accents will face | prejudice in business |
| h. If you want to get | ahead in business |
| i. it is better to sound | as if you are from America |
| j. The key is to avoid | using localized vocabulary |

ODD WORD OUT:

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A recent survey *conducted* / *carried out* / ~~*constructed*~~ on business managers in the UK has revealed that certain regional accents can be "bad for business". Professor Khalid Aziz, a specialist in communication for executives and *high fliers* / *go-getters* / ~~*big-punchers*~~, carried out the survey to ~~*plague*~~ / *gauge* / *assess* the degree to which *prejudices* / *bigotry* / ~~*profanity*~~ against accents exists. He discovered that non-English accents are more conducive to commercial success in Britain. Speakers with an American, Scottish, Indian or Asian accent, be it in a live presentation or in television commercials, are preferred to speakers with even the slightest ~~*twig*~~ / *hint* / *twang* of a regional variation. Professor Aziz asserts: "Although it may not be politically correct to believe that accents matter nowadays, it is very ~~*perspicacious*~~ / *clear* / *apparent* from our research that popular prejudices still exist."

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