

LISTENING DIFFERENT ENGLISH VARIETIES AND ACCENTS

Teshaboyeva Nafisa Zubaydulla qizi

Scientific advisor: Jizzakh branch of the National University of Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulug'bek The faculty of psychology, the department of Foreign languages; Philology and teaching languages: English

Rustamova Dilbar Baxrom qizi

The faculty of psychology the department of Foreign languages: Philology and teaching languages: English, Student of group 101-23

Abstract: In this article, I want to show you the differences between English-speaking countries accents by comparing them with each other and in this way, we will consider how to easily pick up different accents in listening.

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We all know that in the world, the official language of 67 countries is English; however, in their accents, some words and pronunciations have small differences. Let's analyze the differences and similarities.

1. American Accents.

The American accent is quite diverse, with many regional variations. However, there are some general characteristics that are commonly associated with it:

- Full R-pronunciation: American English is known for pronouncing the "r" sound in all positions, unlike some other English accents. For example: "important" in British accent it pronounces /ɪm'pɔ:tənt/ but in American accent it pronounces /ɪm'pɔ:rtənt/
- Schwa Sound: This is a common unstressed vowel sound represented by the symbol "ə." It's often used in unstressed syllables, such as the first syllable of "about" /ə'baʊt/ or the second syllable of "happen" /hæpən/
- T-tapping: In certain contexts, the "t" sound between two vowels can be pronounced as a quick "d" sound, like in "butter" /'bʌtər/ or "water" /'wɔ:tər/
- Vowel Sounds: American English has a unique set of vowel sounds compared to other English accents. Some vowels may be pronounced differently or have more distinct variations. Here's a breakdown of the key vowel sounds in American English:

Monophthongs (single vowel sounds):

- * /i/ (long e): As in "beat," "see," "feet."
- * /ɪ/ (short i): As in "bit," "sit," "fit."
- * /eɪ/ (long a): As in "make," "take," "bake."
- * /ɛ/ (short e): As in "bet," "pet," "met."
- * /æ/ (short a): As in "cat," "hat," "mat."
- * /ʌ/ (short u): As in "cut," "hut," "but."
- * /ə/ (schwa): An unstressed, neutral vowel sound, often found in unstressed syllables.
- * /ɑ/ (broad a): As in "cot," "hot," "not."
- * /ɔ/ (short o): As in "bought," "fought," "thought."
- * /oo/ (long o): As in "boat," "coat," "goat."
- * /ʊ/ (short u): As in "book," "look," "took."
- * /u/ (long oo): As in "boot," "flute," "tune."

Diphthongs (two vowel sounds blended together):

- * /aɪ/ (long i): As in "bite," "fight," "kite."
- * /aʊ/ (ou sound): As in "bout," "house," "mouth."
- * /ɔɪ/ (oi sound): As in "boy," "toy," "joy."

R-colored vowels:

* /ə/ (r-colored schwa): As in "butter," "water," "computer."

* /ɜ:/ (r-colored long e): As in "bird," "word," "heard."

The United States is a vast country with a diverse range of regional accents. Here are some key characteristics of the New York, California, and Boston accents:

- **New York Accent:**

- * Dropping the "r" sound: Often pronounced as /kɑ/ instead of /kɑ:r/ or /aɪdɪə/ instead of /aɪ'di:ə/

- * Unique vowel sounds: The vowel sounds can be distinctive, particularly in words like /kɔfi/ and /wɒtə/

- * Rapid speech: New Yorkers are known for their fast-paced speech and distinctive rhythm.

- **California Accent**

- * Vowel sounds: California accents often feature a more relaxed vowel pronunciation, particularly in the "a" and "o" sounds.

a sound:

cot: /kɑt/ (pronounced like "caught")

stock: /stɑk/ (pronounced like "stalk")

hot: /hɑt/

pop: /pɑp/

body: /bɑdi/

o sound:

boat: /bɑt/ (pronounced like "but")

coat: /kɑt/ (pronounced like "cut")

go: /gɑʊ/ (pronounced like "gow")

no: /nɑʊ/ (pronounced like "now")

- **Boston Accent**

- * "R" pronunciation: Boston accents are known for their distinctive "r" sound, often pronounced as a "w" sound. For example, "park" might sound like /pɑ:k/

2. **British Accents.**

The British accent is not a single, monolithic accent but a wide variety of accents spoken across the United Kingdom. However, one of the most well-known accents is **Received Pronunciation (RP)**, often associated with the BBC and considered a standard form of British English.

Here are some key characteristics of RP:

- **Vowel Sounds:**

- * Diphthongs: RP often features distinct diphthongs (vowel sounds that shift between two positions) that can be challenging for non-native speakers. Here are some examples of diphthongs in British Received Pronunciation (RP) compared to American English:

/aʊ/ sound:

- * RP: pronounced with a more open mouth and a longer glide, as in "house" /haʊs/ and "mouth" /maʊθ/

- * American English: pronounced with a more closed mouth and a shorter glide, as in "house" /haʊs/ and "mouth" /maʊθ/

/əʊ/ sound:

- * RP: pronounced with a more rounded lip position and a longer glide, as in "go" /gəʊ/ and "no" /nəʊ/

- * American English: pronounced with a more open lip position and a shorter glide, as in "go" /gou/ and "no" /nou/

/aɪ/ sound:

- * RP: pronounced with a more central starting point and a longer glide, as in "price" /praɪs/ and "night" /naɪt/

* American English: pronounced with a more front starting point and a shorter glide, as in "price" /praɪs/ and "night" /naɪt/

/ɔɪ/ sound:

* RP: pronounced with a more rounded lip position and a longer glide, as in "boy" /bɔɪ/ and "noise" /nɔɪz/

* American English: pronounced with a more open lip position and a shorter glide, as in "boy" /bɔɪ/ and "noise" /nɔɪz/

Vowel Lengths: Vowel length is a significant feature of British Received Pronunciation (RP), and it can affect the meaning of words. Here are some examples:

Minimal Pairs:

* Ship /ʃɪp/ and sheep /ʃi:p/

* Bit /bɪt/ and Beat /bi:t/

* Cut /kʌt/ and Cute /kju:t/

Other Examples:

* Word: The vowel in "word" is longer than the vowel in "work."

* Beat: The vowel in "beat" is longer than the vowel in "bit."

* Boat: The vowel in "boat" is longer than the vowel in "bot."

* Pool: The vowel in "pool" is longer than the vowel in "pull."

● **Consonant Sounds:**

* Glottal Stops: A glottal stop is a consonant sound produced by completely closing the vocal cords. In British English, glottal stops are commonly used to replace the /t/ sound in certain contexts. Here are some examples:

1. Between Vowels:

* Water: /'wɔ:tə/ becomes /'wɔ:ə/

* Better: /'betə/ becomes /'beə/

* Butter: /'bʌtə/ becomes /'bʌə/

2. At the End of Words:

* What: /wɒt/ becomes /wɒ/

* Hot: /hɒt/ becomes /hɒ/

* Cat: /kæt/ becomes /kæ/

3. Before Consonants:

* Act: /ækt/ becomes /æk/

* Night: /naɪt/ becomes /naɪ/

Besides RP, the UK has a rich tapestry of regional accents, each with its own unique characteristics. Some of the most recognizable include:

* Cockney: A working-class accent from London, known for its distinctive vowel sounds and unique vocabulary.

Th-fronting: Replacing the "th" sound with "f" or "v." For example: "think" pronounces like /fɪŋk/

Dropping of "h" sounds: For instance: "house" /aʊs/, "hello" /'ɛləʊ/.

* Geordie: A regional accent from the North East of England, characterized by its broad vowels and distinctive intonation.

Vowel reduction: For example: "butter" /'bʊtə/.

Explanation:

- The unstressed vowel in the second syllable remains closer to /ə/, but often the "r" is not pronounced, making it sound like /'bʊtə/

- The vowel /ʊ/ in the stressed syllable may differ slightly, maintaining its rounded quality.

* Scouse: A Liverpool accent, known for its rapid speech and unique vowel sounds.

Vowel reduction: "look" /lu:k/ The vowel /ʊ/ in *look* is often lengthened to /u:./.

Consonant changes: "city" /'sɪti/ the "t" sound may sometimes be pronounced sharply as /t/ or softened depending on the speaker.

3. Canadian accents:

* Distinct vowel sounds: Canadian English has a unique vowel sound system, particularly in the pronunciation of words like "about" /ə'baʊ/ and "house" /haʊs/

* Rising intonation: Canadian English often uses a rising intonation pattern, especially in declarative sentences.

* Consonant sounds: Certain consonants, like "t" and "d," can be pronounced with a slight glottal stop, "ladder" /'læɾə/, "butter", /'bʌɾə/

4. Australian accents:

* Vowel sounds: Australian English has a distinctive vowel system, with a more relaxed and open quality compared to other English accents.

Broad "a" sound:

Standard English: "dance"

Australian English: /dɑːns/

Diphthongs:

Standard English: "day"

Australian English: /daɪ/ (a wider and more drawn-out diphthong)

Reduced vowels:

Standard English: "about"

Australian English: /ə'baʊt/ (the first vowel sound, "ə", is often reduced)

Unique vowel qualities:

Standard English: "beer"

Australian English: /bɪə/ (a unique vowel quality that is different from other English accents)

* Consonant sounds: Australian English often features a more relaxed pronunciation of consonants, particularly the "r" sound /kɑː/ "car"

5. Indian accents:

* Vowel sounds:

1. Vowel Length:

Standard English: "bit" and "beat"

Indian English: The distinction between short and long vowels might not be as pronounced. Both words might sound similar, with the vowel in "bit" being lengthened.

2. Vowel Quality:

Standard English: "ship" and "sheep"

Indian English: The vowel sounds in these words might be pronounced with a more similar quality, making it difficult to distinguish between them.

3. Retroflex Vowels:

Indian English: Some Indian languages have retroflex vowels, which are pronounced with the tongue curled back. These sounds might influence the pronunciation of English vowels, especially in certain regions of India.

4. Nasalization:

Indian English: Nasalization, where a vowel sound is pronounced through the nose, can occur in certain words, especially when influenced by regional dialects.

* Consonant sounds:

1. Retroflex Consonants:

Standard English: doesn't have retroflex sounds.

Indian English: Sounds like "t" and "d" but pronounced with the tongue curled back. These sounds are common in many Indian languages and can influence the pronunciation of English words, especially in certain regions of India.

Example: The "t" in "water" might be pronounced with a retroflex sound.

2. Dental Consonants:

Standard English: Dental consonants are pronounced with the tongue tip touching the back of the upper teeth.

Indian English: Dental consonants can be pronounced with a slight dental or alveolar articulation, leading to variations in the sound.

3. Aspiration:

Standard English: Aspiration, the puff of air released after a consonant, is less prominent.

Indian English: Aspiration can be more pronounced, especially in certain consonant clusters.

It can be difficult to understand the different accents in English while listening

Here are some tips to help you easily pick different English accents:

1. Focus on the Vowels:

* American English: Tends to have a more open vowel sound, especially in words like "about" /ə'baʊt/ and "house" /haʊs/

* British English: Often has a more rounded vowel sound, especially in words like "hot" /hɒt/ and "lot" /lɒt/

* Australian English: Can sound similar to British English, but with a more relaxed and drawled pronunciation.

* Canadian English: Often sounds like a blend of American and British English, with a clearer pronunciation of vowels.

* Indian English: Has a unique rhythm and intonation, with a distinct pronunciation of certain consonants and vowels.

2. Pay Attention to the Consonants:

* American English: Tends to drop certain consonants, especially at the end of words.

* British English: Often retains consonant sounds, even in unstressed syllables.

* Australian English: Has a distinctive "broad" accent, with a unique pronunciation of certain consonants, like "r" and "t."

* Canadian English: Pronunciation is generally clear and distinct, with a strong emphasis on consonants.

* Indian English: Has a unique pronunciation of certain consonants, influenced by the sounds of Indian languages.

3. Listen to the Rhythm and Intonation:

* American English: Has a more rhythmic and melodic intonation pattern.

* British English: Often has a more staccato and clipped rhythm.

* Australian English: Has a more relaxed and drawled intonation pattern.

* Canadian English: Has a clear and distinct intonation pattern.

* Indian English: Has a unique rhythm and intonation pattern, influenced by the sounds of Indian languages.

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