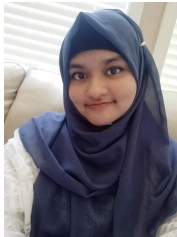




By netlanguages.com

How does a
person's accent
impact your
first impression of them?



My name is Aayesha Islam and I am a 21 year old student at the University of Florida. I'm in the spring semester of my sophomore year and am currently a Computer Science major.

Accent: A window to the Soul

I am sure everyone can relate to the feeling of wanting to make a good first impression on someone. It can be when meeting someone for the first time on a date, your first interview with a company, or your first day as a teacher of a class of students. To prepare, you would usually ponder over whether your attire, makeup, hair, and your facial expressions are perfect. However, you would miss a crucial factor if you only focused on the above!

As it turns out, oftentimes the way [you sound has a bigger impact](#) on a lasting impression than how you *look*. And the way you sound is not only impacted by the loudness of your voice or the cheeriness of your demeanor, but by your accent! Have you ever noticed how [someone's accent can instantly give you clues](#) about where they're from, their social status, and even their personality?

Stereotypes: Imagination vs. Reality



By pixel.com

No one wants to be stereotyped. However, accents make it particularly easy for people to try to put people into stereotypes based on

what they have heard before. Take the example of an interview for a job. The recruiter looks at your profile, sees the skills, experience, but also personal information such as gender, race, and age. Then the recruiter contacts you for an interview, while having a mental image of how you will sound and look. This image will be influenced by what they think people with caliber

should sound like, and may be similar to their own accent and mannerisms, [as according to research](#) people tend to associate positive traits with their own accent and language. If your accent does not match their expectations, they may be prone to distrust your qualifications. They may also have the mindset which is against any foreign accents and they may justify their prejudice against you by the fact that they did not think you were intelligible.

[This article](#) mentions this as an example of a common phenomenon called "own-accent bias" - that is, we prefer people who speak with the same accent as us. This bias starts from a very young age - even babies show a preference for their own language and accent. As we grow older, we tend to associate people who speak like us with positive personality traits, while those with different accents might be perceived as less likable. In a scenario like this, even though your accent does not have any effect on your qualifications and talent for the job, the recruiter may not hire you based on their stereotypes and perceived incompetence.

RMP: Pride & Prejudice and Keyboard Warriors



By dreamstime.com

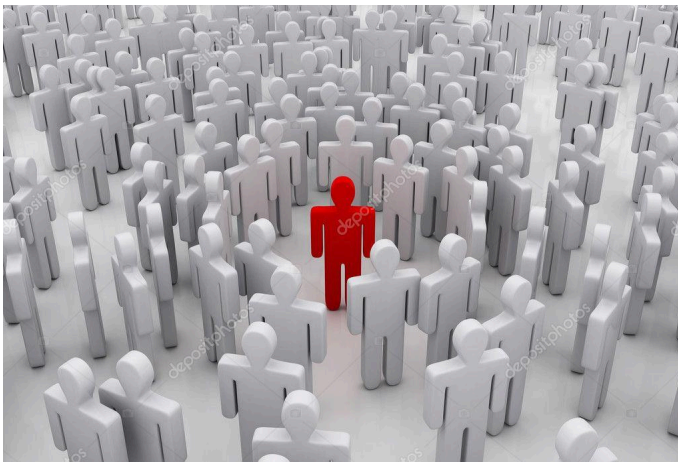
Other than employment, this type of prejudice can also apply [to daily life interactions](#). Ever felt that

you can't understand someone because they are talking too fast? Or having someone repeat something they said because you didn't understand them the first time? This can occur if someone has a different accent than you as well! When you feel like you have to exert extra effort to decipher someone's accent, it can give the feeling that the conversation is inefficient or hard to keep up with. This can cause negative feelings or become an invisible barrier preventing more intimate contact with someone, or in worst case, even cause conflict due to miscommunication. Also, these types of issues can also arise more so due to prejudice rather than the accented person's ineligibility.

The thought, “they are from X or Y province/country, so I will probably not understand their accent” can become a self fulfilling prophecy. According to [this article](#), this is often the case in university courses with foreign professors who teach difficult courses. A student will look at a foreign-sounding name and internalize the thought that they will probably have an accent, and then when they face difficulty in the course, the blame will be placed on the professor’s accent rather than their own lack of effort! Then this jilted student will frustratedly look up the infamous RateMyProfessor (RMP) website where anyone can anonymously review their professor, and bring out their inner keyboard warrior and post a burning review. Another student will look up the professor’s name on RMP and come across this negative review, and the cycle of prejudice will continue. Data has been collected to highlight this phenomenon in a [study](#) that found that instructors with Korean and Chinese last names were rated significantly lower in Clarity and Helpfulness on the website. This study also showed that students were less likely to show extreme positivity towards a professor with an “Asian” name compared to professors who had more common last names, implying that they were influenced by other factors such as prejudice or other negative ratings. Even when there is a positive comment, it is often stereotyping

or backhanded, such as, “She has an accent, but is still intelligible.” This case of university professors proves that accents have an impact even *before* the actual first impression!

First Impression: Reflection vs. Action



By depositphotos.com

An accent should never be something that causes scorn from others, and it certainly should not be interpreted as lack of hard work or

intelligence. The [origins of](#)

[many accents are the same](#), so it goes without saying no accent is “better” than the other. Every dialect and accent has proper and concrete rules in regards to pronunciation and grammar, and each person’s way of speaking is special. A person’s accent is a reveal of their culture, background, and identity, so that should never be a cause of ostracization and discrimination. People who move to another country try their best to assimilate and work very hard to learn the language and culture. Imagine,

trying your best to learn a new language over a long time, but a native speaker laughs at you or belittles your intelligence! That would definitely hurt anyone's feelings.

To wrap this up, there are two things that need to be kept in mind regarding accents and our impression of them. First, our accent impacts people's perception of us more than we think! So, the next time you analyze a memory of a first encounter, definitely think about how you were speaking in addition to what was said! Second, remember that "different" is *not* equal to negative! A person's talents or qualifications are not negatively impacted in the slightest just because their manner of speaking differs from ours! The world is a truly diverse and beautiful place, so we should make it our goal to always be fair and objective in how we view it.

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