

# *Immigrants, Don't Be in Such a Hurry to Shed Your Accents*

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## **Body**

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To the Editor:

You report that immigrants in New York City are turning to speech classes to reduce the sting of discrimination against them based on accent (news article, March 2). I'd like to tell all my fellow immigrants taking accent-reduction classes: As long as you speak fluent and comprehensible English, don't waste your money on artificially removing your accent.

I am fortunate enough to be one of the linguistically gifted. I even acquired an American accent before I left China for the United States five years ago. From the day I set foot on this continent till now, the praise of my English has never ceased. What most people single out is that I have no, or very little accent.

However, I know I *do* have an accent, which some experts say is Chinese and some say British (I had British teachers for the first three years I studied English). Whether it's Chinese or British or maybe a combination, I intend to keep it because it belongs to me.

I want to speak and write grammatically flawless English, but I have no desire to equip myself with a perfect American accent. I always feel it is a pity when I hear Asian-looking youngsters speak indigenous English, especially with a typical American teen-ager pattern of speech. I have always wished they had an accent.

America is probably the largest place for accents in English because the entire nation is composed of immigrants from different areas of the world. This country is built on accents. Accent is one of the most conspicuous symbols of what makes America the free and prosperous land its own people are proud of and other people long to live in.

I work in an urban institution where accents are an integral part of my job: students, faculty and staff come from ethnically diverse backgrounds. Hearing accents confirms for me every day that the college is fulfilling its goal to offer education to a multicultural population.

I wonder what accent my fellow immigrants should obtain after getting rid of their own: a New York accent? A Boston accent? Brooklyn? Texas? California? Or go after President Clinton's accent?

Fellow immigrants, don't worry about the way you speak until Peter Jennings eliminates his Canadian accent.

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Jersey City, N.J., March 3, 1993

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