

Debates and issues surrounding varieties of English often center on the prejudice and discrimination associated with certain accents and dialects. These biases, which are deeply rooted in social, cultural, and historical contexts, are a form of **linguistic prejudice**. They can lead to unfair treatment, reduced opportunities, and negative social judgments.

The Standard vs. Non-Standard Divide

The most common form of prejudice involves a bias toward a "standard" or "prestigious" variety of English. For example, in the UK, **Received Pronunciation (RP)** is often seen as the most prestigious accent, while regional accents like those from Northern England can be stigmatized. Similarly, in the US, a **General American accent** is often seen as the norm, and regional variations like a Southern drawl or accents associated with African American Vernacular English (AAVE) may be stereotyped as "uneducated" or "less intelligent." These judgments have no basis in linguistics, as all language varieties are equally valid and complex.

Accent Bias in the Workplace and Education

Linguistic prejudice has tangible consequences in professional and academic settings.

- **Employment:** Studies have shown that job applicants with accents perceived as non-standard or foreign are often judged as less competent or credible, even if their language skills are excellent. This can lead to discrimination in hiring and promotions.
 - **Education:** Students who speak with non-standard accents may face microaggressions, mocking, or be perceived as less capable by teachers and peers. This can negatively impact their confidence and willingness to participate in class, affecting their academic success.
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Prejudice Against Non-Native Speakers

This bias is particularly pronounced against non-native English speakers. Even highly proficient individuals with strong grammatical and lexical skills can face prejudice because their accents are perceived as "foreign." This is often a proxy for other biases, such as racism or xenophobia, where a person's accent becomes an excuse for prejudice that would otherwise be socially unacceptable. The stereotype of the "untrustworthy" or "less intelligent" non-native speaker can affect everything from social interactions to career opportunities.

Challenging Prejudice

Addressing this prejudice requires recognizing that it's not a judgment about language, but about the social and cultural status of the speaker. Education is key to combating these biases by

promoting an understanding of linguistic diversity and demonstrating that all language varieties are systematic and legitimate. The growing awareness of this issue in academia and the corporate world is leading to efforts to foster more inclusive communication environments.

