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Accents (2): English as an international language

A

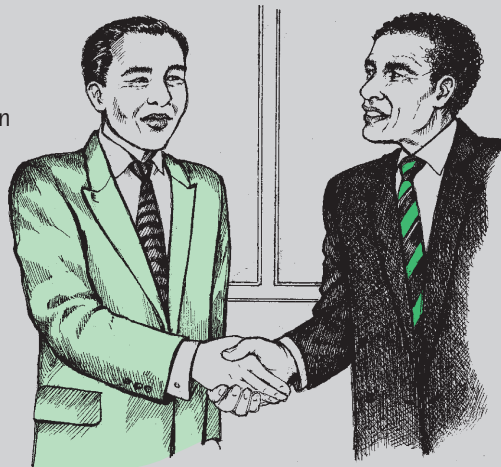
In this book...	
... you will use British English as a model for pronunciation.	In particular, you will use the variety that has come to be known as 'BBC English'. BBC English is the pronunciation used by speakers such as newsreaders and announcers on television and radio, including the World Service. Some of these speakers have regional accents from the United Kingdom, such as Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish accents, but the accent you will hear in this book is typical of those with an English accent. This accent is taken as the 'model' because it is a widely broadcast and respected variety, and for most people is easily understood.
... you will hear a wide variety of English accents.	Recorded material used mainly for listening includes speakers with different English accents. Some have English as their first language (e.g. from Australia and the United States), while others have English as a second or foreign language (e.g. from Japan and Poland). This will help prepare you to understand different pronunciations of English. Information about where speakers come from is given in the Key.

B

Important
for listening

The use of English has spread far beyond those countries where it is used as a first language. In some countries, such as India, Malawi, the Philippines and Singapore, English is an important second language for many speakers, and has often become the language used in official contexts such as courts, parliament and higher education. More recently, many other countries, such as Brazil, China, Thailand and Russia, have recognised the importance of English as an international language of communication, and encouraged its teaching in schools and colleges. In each country, the English spoken is influenced by other languages widely used there, and each variety is different in features of its grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

The widespread use of English as an international language means that much of the interaction in English that now goes on around the world is between speakers who don't have English as a first language. For example, when German and Spanish politicians meet to discuss policies of the European Union, their chosen language of communication might well be English. The same might apply when Saudi Arabian and Japanese people meet to do business.



C

Important
for listening

The consequence of this is that there is an enormous variety of accents of English in addition to those of 'British English', 'American English', 'Australian English' and so on, and you may be more likely to speak to people with 'Indian English', 'Singaporean English' or 'Russian English' pronunciation.

It would be impossible, however, to learn to 'switch' your pronunciation each time you were talking to a speaker with a variety of English different from your own – to use an Australian English pronunciation with an Australian, or Chinese English pronunciation with a Chinese person. Consequently, it is useful to 'model' your pronunciation on one variety – but also recognise that this is just one of many equally acceptable varieties.

Exercises

2.1 You will hear speakers with international accents of English from five countries talking about their families. Where do you think they are from? Listen and write the name of the country in the space.



Speaker 1 is from
 Speaker 2 is from
 Speaker 3 is from
 Speaker 4 is from
 Speaker 5 is from

Poland
 India
 China
 Japan
 Spain

Now check your answers in the Key. Which of these accents do you find easiest to understand and which most difficult? Can you say why? Which of these English accents is closest to your own?

2.2 Listen. You will hear the same text read three times: first by a speaker of BBC English, second by a speaker of Jamaican English, and third by a Polish speaker of English. They are talking about moving into a new house and some of the things they have had to buy.



Here are some notes on how the pronunciation in part of the reading by the speaker of Jamaican English is different from that in the reading by the speaker of BBC English.

Now do the same for this part of the text read by the Polish speaker of English.

... I had to do quite a lot of decorating. I've wallpapered the bedroom and painted the bathroom so far, but there's still quite a lot to do. But I'm in no hurry and I'm really enjoying it. It's great having my own place at last.

2.3 Are there any accents of English that are of particular interest or importance to you? Practise listening to people with these accents as much as possible. If you have access to the internet, you could regularly listen to English language broadcasts where you will hear these accents. For example, for New Zealand accents, try <http://www.radionz.co.nz/>; for Swedish accents of English, Radio Stockholm has a weekly English news broadcast (at http://www.sr.se/rs/red/ind_eng.html) where many of the speakers are Swedish. (For more information, see Unit 4.)

Follow up: Record yourself reading the text in exercise 2.2. Practise a few times before recording. Then write out the text again, and make notes on it, highlighting differences between your pronunciation and that of the speaker of BBC English. (Alternatively, you could get a friend or teacher to make notes for you.)