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Introduction

TASK 1.1 PRE-READING

Before reading Chapter 1, think about the following questions. You may wish to discuss your answers with your classmates and teacher.

- How do you define the word *accent*?
- What is the difference between a *dialect* and an *accent*?
- Who speaks with an accent?
- Does everyone who speaks English have an accent?
- What non-linguistic information do accents convey about people?

1.1 Introduction to the Chapter

How do you define the word ‘accent’? We begin this book by looking at the word *accent* – what it means, and how it relates to other people and ourselves. A common definition of *accent* is that it refers to a speaker’s pronunciation – the way a person *says* particular words. While the terms ‘*accent*’ and *dialect* are often used synonymously, ‘*accent*’ specifically refers to the **pronunciation** of speech sounds, words, and phrases, whereas *dialect* refers not only to pronunciation, but also to other linguistic features, including grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. An *accent* is a part of one’s *dialect*; however, *dialect* is not *only* one’s *accent*. The term **variety** also refers to other features than pronunciation alone and is often used synonymously with ‘*dialect*’ to refer to the different Englishes around the world. In this book, the term ‘*variety*’ is used to refer to the English spoken in a country or region, such as Singapore English in Singapore, Nigerian English in Nigeria, and Australian English in Australia. ‘*Accent*’ in this book is used to refer to the *pronunciation* of speakers of a given variety of English. *Accents* are by nature idiosyncratic, however, and therefore may be best interpreted as the types of features – vowel and consonant sounds and stress, intonation, and pitch patterns – that are associated with speakers of a particular variety of English. In this book, we focus primarily

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on *accent* – how individual speech sounds, words, and phrases are pronounced in varieties of English around the world.

1.2 Understanding and Describing Accents

Who speaks with an accent? Does everyone who speaks English have an accent? Everyone speaks with an accent! Our accents are the result of a range of factors: where we grew up, where we have lived and currently live, the age we learned different languages, other languages spoken, our friendship and peer group networks, our educational background – including educational models, the accents of our teachers and peers at school – among others. Accents are a tapestry of our lives, containing pieces of fabric representing our lived experiences, families, and friendships. They also display our identity – like clothing, hair, jewellery, and make-up, accents can reveal to others how we see ourselves and who we want to be. We reveal social characteristics about ourselves through the way we speak: accents are a powerful mechanism through which we can establish our identity to others and that others use to identify us, particularly in relation to different social groups.

Many different words are used to describe accents – standard vs non-standard; native vs non-native; foreign or second language, or multi-lingual, are just some of the terms that are used to describe a speaker. These terms can have negative connotations and can imply that one accent is better or more legitimate than another. This leads us to several key tenets of the book:

- *Everyone speaks with an accent.*
- *No accent – or variety of English – is inherently better than another accent or variety.*

As this book will show, there are many different varieties of English around the world, with significant differences in pronunciation, and thus difference in accents, across these Englishes; there are also differences in accents *within* varieties of English – speakers of British English may have a Mancunian accent if they grew up in Manchester, whereas other speakers may have a Southern English accent if they are from the south of England. Similarly, speakers of American English may have different regional or ethnic accents, including Southern American English, California American English, Appalachian American English, and African American Vernacular English. *Every* speaker of English – regardless of where they are from, where they grew up, whether they speak English as their only language or one of

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multiple languages – has an accent. This accent is based on the variety or mix of varieties of English the person speaks – Australian, Indian, or South African English – as well as the sub-variety the person may speak within that variety of English, for example Southern British or Manchester English within British English. Due to increased globalization and migration, many people may speak a mix of different Englishes and have a mixed English accent, with features from different varieties.

What non-linguistic information do accents convey about people? Accents carry social meaning. They can tell us whether the speaker speaks other languages – for example, is a multilingual speaker of English (this is often called having a foreign or second language accent if English is learned after childhood). They can also tell us where someone is from – which *variety* of English they speak. The variety can be based on a country of origin – a speaker of English from South Africa, for example, speaks a variety of South African English, while a speaker from Australia speaks Australian English – or it can be a region or even a city within a country, as in Edinburgh English, a variety of Scottish English spoken in the city of Edinburgh. Accents may also be able to tell us ethnic group membership, as in African American Vernacular English in the United States.

Aside from telling us where someone is from and possibly our ethnic group affiliation, the way we speak can also impart a range of social information:

- *Whether we speak other languages:* If you identify someone as being from Singapore or Kenya, for example, you might infer that they are likely to speak another language. In the case of Singapore and Kenya, the speaker may be a multilingual speaker of English, with English one of several languages learned in childhood. The Singapore English speaker may also speak one or more of Singapore's other languages – Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, Hokkien, Tamil, or Malay, among others – while the Kenyan English speaker may also speak Kiswahili, as well as other local languages.
- *Gender:* You will likely be able to ascribe gender to the speaker based on vocal characteristics.
- *Age:* You may also be able to ascribe an age range to the speaker based on vocal characteristics – for example, whether this is a child, a teenager, young adult, middle-aged adult, or older adult.
- *Socio-economic status:* If you are familiar with a speaker's variety of English, and/or features of the speaker's accent, you may be able to ascribe a particular social class to the speaker based on accent – for example, working, middle, or upper class.

TASK 1.2 Listening for Varieties of English

 Listen to the speech samples from fifteen speakers of English and try to answer the following questions for each speaker:

- (1) Where is the speaker from?
- (2) Which variety of English is the person speaking?
- (3) Can you identify unique features for each variety of English?
- (4) Can you give any other information about each speaker (for example, gender, approximate age)?

What did you notice or listen for in the speech samples? We may be able to identify the speaker's variety of English based on our experience and/or familiarity with particular varieties. If we are familiar with a given variety, we may be able to identify a speaker by listening for specific vowel and consonant sounds, speech rhythm, and pitch and tone associated with this variety. If you are familiar with Malaysian English, for example, you may easily be able to identify Speaker 4 as being a speaker of Malaysian English. If you are not familiar with this variety, however, it may be more difficult to identify which variety Speaker 4 speaks. We may know there are particular ways in which a Malaysian English speaker pronounces vowels, consonants, words, and phrases; if we hear a speaker exhibit those features, we may very likely be able to identify that speaker as a speaker of Malaysian English. We may also be able to identify the region within a country that a speaker is from if we are familiar with regional variation in different varieties: for example, we may identify Speaker 6 as being from the United States and a speaker of American English; if we are familiar with American English, we may also identify the speaker as a speaker of Midwestern American English, a variety spoken in the Midwestern region of the United States.

In addition to country and region, we may also be able to identify the speaker's gender and age. To identify age, we may rely on rate of speech: Skoog Waller, Eriksson, and Sorqvist (2015) have shown that speech rate decreases across time, meaning that older speakers have a slower rate than younger speakers. This speech cue has been found to be a reliable indicator of age. Usage of pronunciation features may also vary with age in particular varieties of English. In addition, we may assign gender to the speaker based on speech cues; how we ascribe gender is the result of physiological differences in the vocal tracts of men and women, which can result in a higher pitch for women and lower pitch for men, along with other differences (this will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters) (Pernet & Belin, 2012).

Let's go back to Task 1.2.

- What did you notice about each speaker's accent?
 - Could you accurately identify gender and approximate age?
 - Can you give any other information about each speaker based on their accent?
- (1) Speaker 1 is from Wellington, New Zealand. The speaker is a man aged 21–5. His native language is English. He speaks *New Zealand English*.
 - (2) Speaker 2 is from Cape Town, South Africa. The speaker is a woman aged 18–20; her native language is English. She also speaks some Afrikaans. She speaks *White South African English*.
 - (3) Speaker 3 is from the Aschaffenburg region in Bavaria, Germany. The speaker is a woman aged 21–5 and her native language is German. She speaks *German English*.
 - (4) Speaker 4 is from Selangor, Malaysia. The speaker is a woman aged 21–5; her native languages are Malay and English. She also speaks Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese) and Cantonese. She speaks *Malaysian English*.
 - (5) Speaker 5 is from Harare, Zimbabwe. The speaker is a woman aged 18–20. Her native languages are English and Shona. She speaks *Zimbabwean English*.
 - (6) Speaker 6 is from Wyoming, a state in the Midwestern region of the USA. The speaker is a woman aged 21–5. Her native language is English. She speaks a Midwestern dialect of *American English*.
 - (7) Speaker 7 is from Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh, India. The speaker is a man aged 26–30. His native languages are Hindi and English. He speaks *Indian English*.
 - (8) Speaker 8 is from Queensland, Australia. The speaker is a woman aged 18–20. She is a native speaker of English. She speaks *Australian English*.
 - (9) Speaker 9 is from Anhui, China. The speaker is a man aged 21–5. He is a native speaker of Putonghua. He speaks *China English*.
 - (10) Speaker 10 is from Derby, East Midlands, England. The speaker is a woman aged 31–5. She is a native speaker of English. She speaks an East Midlands dialect of *British English*.
 - (11) Speaker 11 is from Santiago, Chile. The speaker is a man aged 26–30. His native language is Spanish. He speaks *Chilean English*.

- (12) Speaker 12 is from Seoul, South Korea. The speaker is a man aged 21–5. He is a native speaker of Korean. He speaks *Korean English*.
- (13) Speaker 13 is from Hong Kong SAR. The speaker is a woman aged 18–20. She is a native speaker of Cantonese. She speaks *Hong Kong English*.
- (14) Speaker 14 is from Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The speaker is a man aged 18–20. He is a native speaker of Russian and the Kyrgyz language. He speaks *Kyrgyzstan English*.
- (15) Speaker 15 is from Islamabad, Pakistan. The speaker is a man aged 26–30. He is a native speaker of Urdu and Sindhi. He speaks *Pakistani English*.

In addition to country, region, ethnicity, age, and gender, speech cues – and particularly pronunciation features – may also indicate membership in social and peer group networks, socio-economic status and/or educational level, and possibly our profession. This leads to several other key tenets of the book:

- *The social meaning of different accent features varies across contexts.*
- *Accents can change across time.*
- *No linguistic feature is inherently better than another.*

The use of specific accent features may help identify us as a speaker of a particular variety of English. The use of postvocalic /r/ (this is the ‘r’ sound after the vowel in words such as *car* and *heard*; the term ‘postvocalic’ means that the ‘r’ is realized after – or post – the vowel) may indicate that a person is a speaker of a variety of American English, while not having postvocalic /r/ may indicate a speaker of a variety of British English (this will be discussed at length in Chapter 4). Within a particular variety of English, it may also indicate the region the speaker is from: in the US, for example, not having postvocalic /r/ may be one feature that indicates a person is from New England, the Southern US, or New York City. Not having postvocalic /r/ is also a feature of African American Vernacular English, and thus it may be one feature (of many) that may indicate ethnic group membership. Postvocalic /r/ may also indicate socio-economic status and educational background in some contexts, but the status of it varies. In Singapore, for example, not all speakers have postvocalic /r/; it is typically associated with a higher educational background as well as a higher socio-economic status (Tan, 2012). In India, however, not having postvocalic /r/ may be more prestigious to some speakers and associated with higher socio-economic status (Chand, 2010).

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As this demonstrates, just as no accent is inherently better than another, no accent feature is better than another. However, social judgements about speakers often result from how our accents (and varieties of English, in general) are interpreted. Just as we use our accent as well as other linguistic and non-linguistic features to create and mark our identity, others use our speech to identify us.

Language is dynamic and changes across time, and our accent may change across our lifetime. This can be a result of moving to different countries and regions, our educational experiences, and peer and social group influences. In my own research on Hong Kong English, I have also found that exposure to mass media – and particularly American mass media – spreads American features of English, including increasing the use of post-vocalic /r/, for example, in contexts where this is less common (Hansen Edwards, 2016a). What we want to sound like – and in which social groups we want to aspire to gain or retain membership – may also impact our accent; in other words, we may be able to change our accent and/or dialect if we perceive that the social meaning of the linguistic features we use are at odds with how we identify ourselves and want to be identified by others. This, of course, requires awareness of the social meaning of different linguistic features as well as the ability to change them. As noted above, some people speak a mix of different varieties of English, particularly if they have moved from one region or country to another during their childhood or adolescence; other people may be multi-dialectal or multi-varietal, moving between two or more dialects (and accents) depending on the social setting and interactants. In my own case, I was a monolingual speaker of Danish until the age of 10, as I was born in Jutland, Denmark. My family immigrated to the state of Wisconsin, in the Midwestern region of the United States, when I was 10; I learned to speak American English with a General American English dialect, meaning that my English does not have any notable regional features. Sadly, most linguistic traces of my Danish childhood have disappeared from my English. Nearly twenty years ago, I moved to Hong Kong SAR, a former British colony where British English still has prestige. As a result of living in this former British colony, and marriage to an Australian, my English has changed. I have picked up British (and Australian) English vocabulary that is more commonly used in Hong Kong: I no longer stand in line, but rather queue; I add fuel to my car, not gas; and a friend is a mate. My pronunciation has shifted slightly too; once in a while, I find myself saying *water* with a mix of American and British sounds. I still speak American English but, through my experience in Hong Kong, I have acquired new pronunciation and vocabulary features, allowing me to change the way I sound (consciously or unconsciously) depending on the social situation and interactants.

TASK 1.3 Listening for English Accents

 Listen to the eleven speakers of English talk about their accents.

- (1) Where are they from?
- (2) Where have they lived?
- (3) Which other languages do they speak?
- (4) Which variety of English do they state they speak?
- (5) Why do they feel they speak this variety of English?
- (6) What has influenced their accents the most?
- (7) Have their accents changed?
- (8) If so, which factors have influenced these changes?

1.3 Accents and Varieties of English

In this book, the term **varieties of English** is used as an umbrella term for the ways in which English is spoken around the world. While the current book focuses primarily on the *accents* of these Englishes, there are also differences across varieties in other linguistic aspects, including vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. ‘Varieties of English’ in this book references the pronunciation of English across and within different continents, countries, and regions – the sounds of English around the world. The term **English** is also used as an umbrella term for hundreds of Englishes that are spoken around the world due to social, geographic, sociopolitical, and linguistic factors. Just as there is no one accent, there is no *one* English. As we will discover in Chapter 2, when we learn about the history of the English language, English has never been one language, but rather arose from a mix of different languages, including Germanic, Scandinavian, and Romance languages, among others, and different English accents have always existed as the English language is continually in a state of change.

As an example, ‘British English’ is a term used for the varieties of English spoken in the United Kingdom, which comprises England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. There are many different varieties of British English, including: ‘English’ English, spoken in England; Welsh English in Wales; and Scottish English in Scotland. Within each of these varieties, in turn, there are many different varieties based on regional, ethnic, and social variation. ‘English’ English, for example, has significant regional variation, with differences between northern and southern varieties, and even between smaller regions and counties, such as Yorkshire English, and cities, including Manchester English. The standard (and most socially prestigious) form of this English is called Standard Southern British English (SSBE), as it is

most closely associated with the speech features of southern England. In the past, this variety was called Traditional Received Pronunciation (Trad RP); the term ‘BBC English’ has also been used, as British newscasters traditionally had this accent, though that is no longer the case. The term ‘Modern RP’ (‘Mod RP’) represents a more current RP and is often used interchangeably with SSBE. ‘Northern Irish English’ is a general term used for varieties of English spoken in Northern Ireland, which includes several sub-varieties based on regional differences: Ulster English, Belfast English, Ulster Scots, and Hiberno English. Similarly, regional differences exist in Scottish English and Welsh English, as well as many other varieties of English around the world, including American English, which comprises a range of Northern, Southern, Midwestern, New England, and Western varieties.

‘Varieties of English’ also refers to any ethnic group varieties that exist within and across different regions, including both Pasifika and Māori Englishes in New Zealand, and African American Vernacular English, Native American English, and Asian American English in the United States, among others, due to immigration as well as geographic concentration of different ethnic groups in particular regions. Ethnic varieties of English are referred to as **ethnolects** – ethnic dialects. Different dialects – and therefore accents – also exist within ethnolects: as an example, ‘Native American English’ (also called American Indian English and/or Reservation Accent) is best viewed as an umbrella term for a range of Native American Englishes, due to the many Native American tribes in the United States, including the Cherokee, Lumbee, Lakhota People, Apache, Sioux, and Navajo, and the different languages spoken by these tribes.

1.4 The Purpose of This Book

Why does this book focus on varieties of English? The book and the accompanying website aim to inform you about the diversity in how English is spoken around the world to provide an expansive and inclusive discussion of English phonetics and phonology. The book seeks to broaden your understanding of what English *sounds* like, to demonstrate that English has many different ways of sounding and that this reflects both historical and geographical language influences. The book has been designed to provide you with training in English phonetics and phonology, to expose you to variation in the phonetics and phonologies of varieties of Englishes around the world, and to enable you to acknowledge and represent your own English accents. The book and website also aim to equip you with the tools – phonetic transcription, acoustic analysis, and exposure to different English varieties – to acknowledge, understand, and analyse similarities

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and differences across Englishes worldwide, and to analyse your own phonological features. Phonetic transcription practice is embedded into the tasks of many of the chapters, with a particular focus on your transcription of your own speech in order to investigate your own pronunciation and to avoid a prescriptive approach to English phonetics and phonology based on American or British English pronunciation norms.

The book draws on current research in English phonetics and phonology to provide a state-of-the-art discussion of the sounds of English around the world. In aiming to be inclusive and expansive, the book draws on a wide range of available resources and research; if discussions of some varieties have been omitted or appear brief, it is primarily for two reasons: (1) there are few available resources or research on a given variety; and (2) there is a need to balance representation across different continents and countries where English is spoken.

1.5 The Features of This Book

The book focuses on both English phonetics and English phonology in varieties of English around the world. ‘Phonetics’ refers to the individual vowel and consonant sounds of a language – in our case, varieties of English – while ‘phonology’ refers to how these individual speech sounds pattern in a language, or a variety of English: where each speech sound occurs, in which combination the sounds can occur together, and how the nature of speech sounds may change based on where they occur in a syllable or word. The book has several notable features:

- (1) acoustic descriptions of different speech sounds, with accompanying visuals displaying a range of information, including the acoustic characteristics of vowels and consonants, intonation, and pitch in different varieties of English, in order to demonstrate visually the concepts of the book.
- (2) a website with speech samples from a wide range of Englishes around the world, including Englishes from Africa, such as Kenyan, Zimbabwean, and South African Englishes; Asia, for example Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysian, Sri Lankan, Nepalese, Indian, and Pakistani Englishes; North America, including different varieties of American and Canadian English; the Caribbean, including Puerto Rican English; Europe, including several varieties of British English, as well as Irish English; and Oceania, including Australian and New Zealand Englishes. Reference to these speech samples is made in every chapter in the book. While speech samples are available for many of the varieties discussed, not