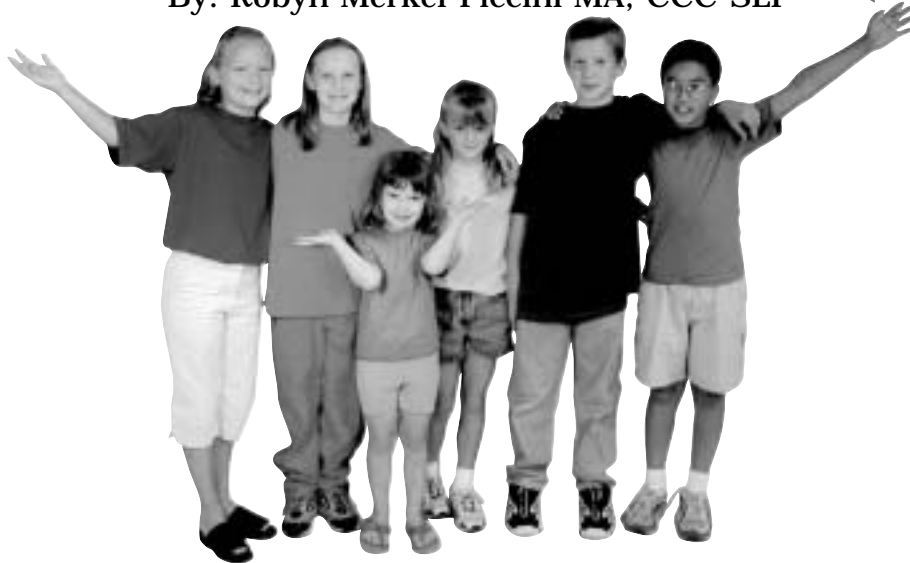


What's News in Speech!

by

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TOPIC: Understanding Accents and Dialects

One of the most challenging problems in the classroom, and in the field of Speech Pathology is the foreign accent. Students and/or parents with foreign accents may be difficult to understand. One of the keys to understanding an accent is understanding the major factors involved. **The purpose of this Newsletter is to discuss the various accents and their major characteristics.**

Dialects vs. Accents

In the United States, accents and dialects vary from region to region and state to state. An accent is defined as the phonetic traits of an individual's native language carried over into a second non-native language. A dialect is a variation of a language spoken in a given geographical region.

The largest dialect of standard English is known as "Black Vernacular English" (BVE). BVE was originated in the African-American Population, but is also spoken by persons of other races. BVE follows its own rules for grammar, articulation and morphemes. BVE is the topic of many debates, as African Americans recognize it as a cultural language, while many educators believe that it is sub-standard English. BVE is common in New York, Newark, the Southern States, St. Louis and Chicago.

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Another nationally recognized dialect is called “Boston English” which is the dialect common to most Tri-state, New York and New Jersey residents. Final /r/ deletion, nasalized vowels and d/th substitution errors are common in the tri-state area.

The dialect common to many southerners is known as the “Southern Drawl.” This dialect is one of the oldest. Other regional dialects may include: Pennsylvania Dutch, East Coast, Cajun, and Midwest dialects.



Speech Pathologists often work with actors who are attempting to imitate a regional dialect or accent for a movie or play. This practice is known as “accent acquisition.”

Another common speech therapy practice is known as “accent reduction.” Most clients who seek accent reduction are bilingual; however, some clients wish to decrease their use of a regional dialect. Foreign accent reduction focuses on helping individuals improve their English pronunciations while maintaining the charm of their native language. Dialect reduction focuses on helping individuals speak with standard American dialect for professional or social situations.

A child in a public or private school may not be treated for accent reduction. This is why it is important for teachers to recognize various foreign accents and regional dialects. The articulation errors demonstrated by a bilingual child or child with a regional dialect must be the result of an auditory discrimination or an oral-motor problem to warrant Speech treatment. It is imperative to understand the difference between a “language difference” and a “language disorder”.

HOW CAN ONE LANGUAGE SOUND SO DIFFERENT?

It’s quite amazing that one language has so many variations. There are components which make dialects and accents unique. There are too many specific accents to describe, so the following information is an overview:

1. Prosody/Intonation: Languages have a variety of rhythm patterns, loudness levels, tonal variations and inflections. Bilingual persons often carry the

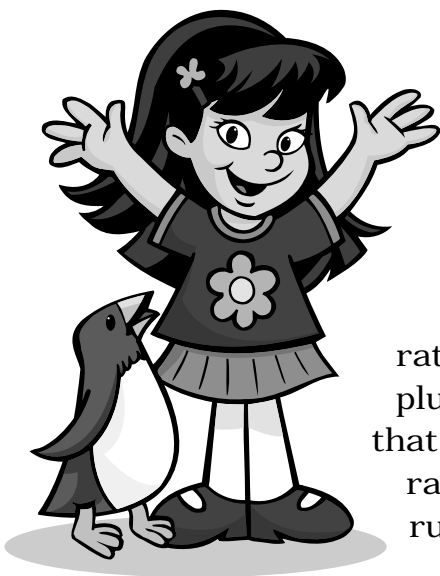
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prosodic pattern of their native language over to other languages they speak.

2. Articulation: The English language contains specific speech sounds, as do all other world languages. Foreign accents often involve sound substitution errors resulting from the person not being adept at producing all the speech sounds of their non-native language. For example, the Indian language does not have the “f” or “v” sounds, so you may hear a substitution error similar to “pan” for “fan.”



3. Vowels: Although most languages share many of the same vowels, the exact positioning of oral structures or stress placed when producing vowels often varies. Persons who are not from America may produce vowel sounds characteristic of their native language or dialect when speaking.



4. Grammar: Syntax (grammar) patterns are very different across languages. For example, adjectives are placed after the noun in Spanish (ex., “boca grande”) . In contrast, adjectives are typically placed before the noun in English (ex., “big cow”). On many occasions, a person may use the syntax pattern of their native language when speaking English. So the person who speaks Spanish may say “shoes red” rather than “red shoes.” Another example is the absence of plural forms in the Asian languages. You may see a sign that reads “8 chicken wing for \$2.99” in a Chinese restaurant, because they have carried over the Chinese grammar rules to English.

In conclusion, accents and dialects are discussed extensively in the field of Speech-Language Pathology. As teachers, you may have difficulty understanding some of our bilingual students. Their production of Standard American English should improve with general reading / writing / language education. Please refer these students to the Speech-Language Pathologist if you notice they are having difficulties that are not due to their accent or dialect. Remember . . . , in many ways, accents and dialects make people even more unique!

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