



# Diverse Issues



Volume 2, No. 3

May/June/July 2001

## Diversity in People: Accenting “Standard English”

The use of language and the ability to speak “Standard English” in America can have serious consequences for people in this country. What is Standard English? Milroy and Milroy (1999) suggest that Standard English is “an idea in the mind rather than a reality – a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent” (p. 22-23). Standard means the “accepted manner in which native speakers of a language produce a specific sound or combination of sounds which find some degree of acceptance and favor over space and social distinction (Langdon, 1999; Lippi-Green, 1997).

Accent is how an individual pronounces a given language. Sometimes we think of people with an accent as those who “talk funny.” An accent includes a combination of consonants and vowels and prosodic features, including duration, rhythm, stress, pitch, intonation, and loudness.

There are two kinds of accent. One is first language accent, or variation in the use of one’s native language. Variations may be related to the geographical area or cultural group to which one belongs. Examples include a Maine accent, an Appalachian accent, a Jewish accent, and Black English. Lippi-Green (1997) shares an example, John Kennedy’s Boston variety of English. He once noted that Bostonian’s “saved all the r’s *paaking aa caas in Haavaad yaad* [parking our cars in Harvard yard] in order to put them on the end of *idear* and *Cuber* [idea and Cuba]. Every native speaker or English speaks with a first language accent.

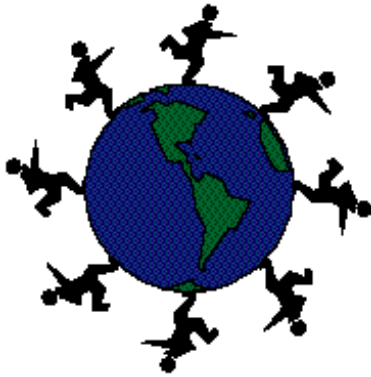
The second kind of accent is a second language accent that occurs when a native speaker of a different language learns to speak English. Accent is the breakthrough of the native language phonology into the English. We may say that a person has a Dutch accent because the phonologies of Dutch influence the learner’s pronunciation of U. S. English.

The degree to which a person can substitute one accent for another is severely dependent upon the age at which the second language is learned. While children can learn a second or third language with ease, the same is not true for adults. At some point during adolescence, we move past the developmental stage for language acquisition. A person’s distinctive intonation and phonological features (accent) are hard-wired in the brain and are difficult to change. It is unrealistic to expect a person who learned to speak English as an adult to sound just like a native English speaker, regardless as to commitment, intelligence, and motivation. *(continued on page 2)*

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People such as Henry Kissinger, Butros Butros Ghali, and Joseph Conrad, while speaking English very clearly, never lost their accents. The length of time spent in the community and the type of pronunciation difference or phonological rule involved, also play an important part in determining the extent to which a person can



speak a second language without an accent.

Although we are less likely to directly discriminate against others based on race, ethnicity, homeland, or

economics (due to ethical, moral, and legal motivations), discrimination based on language seems to be “fair game.” In this country, one’s ability is often judged on the basis of how well one speaks English. Unintelligence is one attribute that is often assigned to those who speak with a heavy accent. The courts document a number of cases brought against employers for discrimination based on language.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, and national origin. And, in 1987, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission more specifically defined national origin to include linguistic characteristics of a national origin (EEO, 1987). Under this law, however, employers have some latitude. Employers can deny employment if the accent interferes materially with job performance or the safety of the employee or others. This law only protects accents related to national origin.

Foreign accents are not the only accents that are viewed negatively. Accents related to variation in style and pronunciation of native English speech are also subject to negative evaluation and discrimination.

The Southern “twang” or “drawl” is often a source of ridicule by many Northerners. This is

particularly true of those living in the Deep South: Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Georgia. The southern accent is associated less with intellectual strength and more with common sense and life experience.

Lippi-Green (1997) shares the story of a foreign language professor, a native of the South, who interviewed with an extremely elite undergraduate college in the northeast. The first substantial part of the interview was conducted in a foreign language and went well. When the interviewers switched to English and the professor answered using his southern dialect, the interviewers all broke out laughing. Next he was asked whether he thought he would “be comfortable” at their institution. This professor learned that he would be taken seriously only while using a socially prestigious language, even when it was not English.

African American Vernacular English (AAVE), also referred to as Black English or Ebonics, has been a source of controversy in both mainstream and African American communities. While some question and deny the validity of this language, others identify specific phonological and grammatical, as well as, stylistic features of AAVE, which are consistent over space. It has been “guestimated” that between 80% and 90% of the black population speaks AAVE to some degree (Rickford, forthcoming). As in any language, there are social and regional variations.

A common belief is that AAVE is used only by poor or working class African Americans. However, while middle class blacks may avoid use of grammatical features of AAVE, many will use features such as intonation, tag questions, and sermonic tone to signal togetherness with the greater African American community. To many users of mainstream Standard English, the use of AAVE is an indication of ignorance.

The *ask-ax* controversy is one of the most popular arguments used as solid proof that AAVE users are ignorant. The “misuse” of the word *ask*, is the basis for negatively judging the entire content of the message and the intelligence

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of the messenger. In fact, the word *ax* is an Old English variation of *ask*. Use of the word *ax* survived to almost the year 1600 as a regular literary form, when *ask* became the literary preference (Lippi-Green, 1997). *Ax* is not an innovation of AAVE. It is found in Appalachian speech and outside the U.S. in some regional varieties of British English.

Other accents, which are often viewed negatively in this country, are Asian accents and Spanish accents. In fact, we are so conditioned to expect an accent that we sometimes hear one when none is present. People who look different are expected to sound different, even if they are monolingual native English speakers. In experimental studies (Rubin, 1992), participants have rated the voice on one audio tape as having a stronger foreign accent than the other, when in fact, the voice on both audio tapes were the same voice of a native English speaker. The only difference was the picture shown to represent the person speaking on the audio tape. The person in one picture was Caucasian and in the other was Asian. Additionally, participants scored their understanding of the information they heard lower when the picture they viewed was of the Asian person. These findings beg the question of whether the issue is so much accent as “otherness.”

It is important to note that the United States is not the only country where language ideologies exist. In all nations, one can find languages considered “good” and “appropriate,” while others are considered “lesser” and “inappropriate.” Castilian Spanish, for example, is often considered inherently superior and more worthy than the Spanish spoken in the Yucatan. Germans distinguish “High German,” used in more formal, intellectual settings from other varieties of German used in everyday conversation.

Not all accents are considered negative. French accents, for example, are considered positive by many. Several popular movie stars are admired for their Australian accents. And the courts do not contain records of native speakers of Dutch or Swedish, or Gaelic experiencing job discrimination because of their communication

**Good Morning - English**  
**Buenos días - Spanish**  
**Bon Matin - French**  
**Guten Morgen - German**  
**Buon giorno - Italian**  
**Boa Manhã - Portuguese**  
**God Morning - Norwegian**

difficulties (Lippi-Green, 1997). Language subordination tends to target those who are perceived to be most different – different in race, ethnicity, homeland, or other social allegiances, which vary from the mainstream.

In many U.S. states, the immigrant population is expected to more than double between 1995 and 2025 (Rong, 1998). As America becomes an increasingly multicultural nation, the notion of an “accent” may change. It is hopeful that we, as a nation, will become increasingly skilled in our ability to understand English spoken with various accents and tolerant in our attitudes toward all accents.

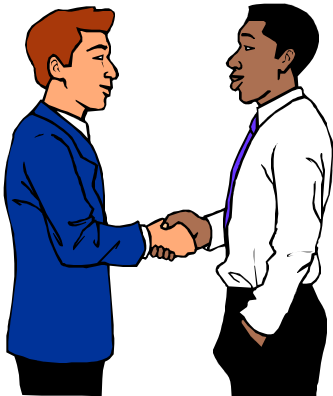
Communication is a two-way process. Both the speaker and the listener have a responsibility for the act of communication. It is certainly true that different or foreign accents can interfere with the listener’s ability to understand the message. It is also true, however, that accents can conjure up negative evaluations of the speaker, reducing the listener’s willingness to accept their responsibility in the communication process. Sometimes, it becomes easy to say, “I simply can’t understand you,” placing full responsibility for the communication process on the speaker.

We all have standards and preferences about the spoken language, and certain accents are indeed frustrating. Hopefully, though, we can make an effort to hear the *content* of the message and look beyond the stereotypes associated with the *way* the message is being spoken.

*(continued on page 7)*

## *Diversity In The Workplace: Cultural Diversity In Conflict Resolution*

Considering the increasing diversity in our workplaces today, resolving conflicts among workers has become more complex. Conflicts among workers exist in all work settings and cultural differences can add to the difficulty in managing and resolving them. For successful mediation in today's workplace, employees need both awareness of cultural differences *and* skills in mediation.



Increasing one's awareness of cultural differences can help to reduce misinterpretation and miscommunication. For example, while it may seem logical to deal with issues one at a time and sequentially, those in some cultures take more of a global approach to problem solving. They approach problems in a more integrative manner that may lead to discussion of many problems at once.

Many Americans consider it rude to interrupt others while speaking. Yet, in some cultures, interrupting is not only acceptable, but indicates that one is paying attention and is involved in the conversation. Passive listening may be a sign of lack of interest.

Some cultures use more restrained communication styles, tending to be more "poker faced," more monotonic, less emotional, and less intense in use of eye contact. Other cultures are more expressive in communication style. Emotions are expressed more freely, speech is more dramatic, and eye contact may be more intense. For those who tend toward a more restrained style, a strong show of emotion, especially anger, may seem worse than intended and lead to an expectation of violence when none is forthcoming. The more restrained person may consider such expressiveness to be unprofessional.

The application of rules to one's self and others may vary among people. While some people believe that rules should be applied to everyone in the same way all the time, others believe rules should be applied according to the circumstances and people involved. A person's orientation in this regard may affect not only how closely they follow the ground rules of mediation, but also what importance they give to the details and specificity of the final agreement. One may want to emphasize consistency or flexibility throughout the mediation, depending on the cultural orientation and upbringing of the other person involved.

Awareness of cultural differences can help both parties feel more comfortable and trusting in the mediation process. In addition to cultural awareness, however, access to appropriate tools are equally important in conflict resolution.

Daniel Dana, Professor of Psychology, suggests "Do-it-yourself mediation" as a useful tool that empowers employees across cultures and groups to achieve common ground. This tool consists of four simple steps:

### **1. Find a time to talk.**

The first step is to "get the parties to the table." Have a brief conversation with your "other" to identify the issue that needs to be discussed and to establish willingness to join the dialogue about it.

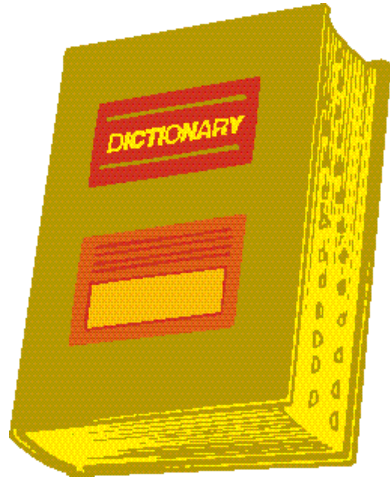
### **2. Plan the context.**

Ensure that the time and place of the meeting will allow extended, uninterrupted dialogue about the issue.

*(continued on page 5)*

## Diverse Activity: Same Words But Different

Words have come into the language of our country from every nation of the world. A true multicultural experience for youth and adults is to make a dictionary of words that we use but which originated in other cultures. For example: kimono, canoe, Sabbath, ski, chauffeur, dachshund, menu, sauerkraut, waltz, and garage. Many others can be discovered by examining the dictionary for derivatives or looking through books on etymology. It will be interesting to discover that many words in various languages are similar. As an example, take the English word for mother. Mother is mere in French, mutter in German, madre in Spanish, mati in Russian, and mader in Persian. Point out the commonality of people from different cultures through similar word spellings and uses.



It might be fun to make a map of word origins. Draw a large world map on butcher paper and then write in the words that we have “borrowed” from other cultures. For instance, we have tea, as well as its name from China, and khaki from India

In addition to words, take a look at names. Discover how and where they were derived and their original meaning. There may be more than one person in the group named John. John came from the Hebrew name Yohanan, which means Gift of God. Today, variations of that name are found throughout the world – Jean in France, Jan in Holland, Johann in Germany,

Juan in Spain, Giovanni in Italy, and Ivan in Russian.

You may also wish to explore surnames. These names derived from personal characteristics, occupations, offices held, terms of affection, and locations where people lived, as evidenced in the surnames of Smart, Hill, Goldsmith, Duke, Davidson, and Peterkin. Challenge members of your group to find the origins of their names. Ask each person to share his/her findings. The following web site is one source for discovering the meaning and origins of first names: <http://www.behindthename.com>. Look for others.

*(Conflict Resolution - Continued from page 4)*

### 3. Talk it out.

Keep engaged in sustained dialogue about the disputed issue. Prevent power plays that would impose a one-sided solution. And, listen for an attitude shift that signals that a breakthrough may be possible.

### 4. Make a deal.

Once this attitude shift occurs, design a balanced agreement that specifies expected behavior that will ensue that the problems of the past will not be repeated in the future.

“Do-it-yourself mediation” can be used to engage colleagues in conversation to find mutually acceptable solutions in the workplace. If you perceive that the behavior of the “other” is a result of culturally based behavior or stereotypes, make those perceptions a part of the dialogue. According to Dana, “Do-it-yourself mediation” draws on our basic human nature to bring us to common ground.

*Sources:*

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## *Diversity Around the State: Food is a Fun Way To Learn About Different Cultures*

*Submitted by Beth Van Horn  
Family Living Agent  
Centre County*

Cooking is a fun way to learn about cultures. Forty youth, ages 8 to 15, had a wonderful opportunity to learn this lesson at the Central Region's Food Extravaganza held in Bedford in July. Youth were first treated to the story, *Everyone Bakes Bread*, by Norah Dooley. In the story, the main character discovers that her neighbors come from different places and that everyone makes a different kind of bread.

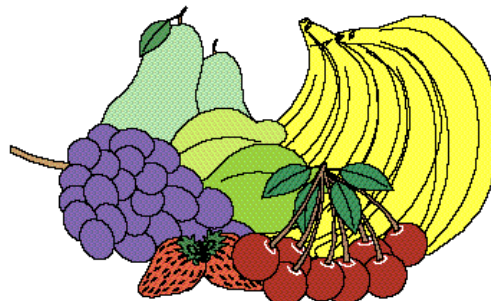


Following the story, youth were given copies of the various recipes in the book and asked to discover what was similar and what was unique about all of the ingredients. They learned that some breads are baked, some are fried, some are flat, and some are braided. Some breads are even used as eating utensils.

Finally, the youth made a variety of ice cream sundaes with topping ingredients from around the world. Ingredients were placed in separate bowls and labeled with the name of the food and the country with which it is associated. Youth were introduced to each ingredient and given a brief description of its origin. Some of the ingredients included the following: peanuts from Africa, pistachio nuts from the Middle East, crushed toffee bars from England, macadamia nuts from Australia, pineapple chunks from the Caribbean and Polynesia, crushed butter cookies from Denmark, sliced kiwi from New Zealand, muesli from Switzerland, brazil nuts from Brazil, maraschino cherries from Italy, ground cardamom from India, and chocolate chips from the United States.



In addition to the wonderful taste treat, youth learned how ice cream came to the United States. Youth also discussed which countries do not have a lot of dairy products and the benefits of global interactions. By the end of the lesson, youth were able to identify foods that represented different cultures. They also learned that while some food ideas are the same in all cultures, unique regional flavors are developed by using the available foods in the culture.



## Diversity Resource: Spanish Language Health and Nutrition Education Materials for Kids

**From the Washington State Dairy Council 1-800-470-1222**

*Pyramid Sticker Activity Master.* Teaches the Food Guide Pyramid, serving sizes and includes a diet history and nutrition quiz. Item #DC32M \$.25 each.

*Pyramid Stickers.* Item #DC32 \$3.00/pkg of 100 stickers.

*Growing Up Healthy.* Colorful brochure offers parents practical tips for healthy eating for toddlers 18 months to 3 years. Item #DC525 \$.20 each.

**From NEAT Solutions 1-888-577-6328**

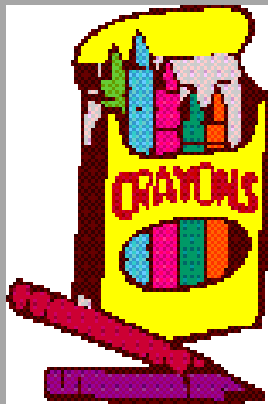
*Five Senses.* Expressive real life children and their cartoon character friends. Illustrate the five senses. 27" x 34" display poster. Item #T-8012 \$8.99.

*Mis Cinco Sentidos (My Five Senses).* Sight, smell, taste, hearing, and touch – our senses teach us about our world. Soft cover, 32 pages, for ages 3-6. Item #HC-4450SP \$5.95.

*The Magic School Bus Explains the Human Body.* 40-page, soft cover story book for ages 4-8. Item #SB-0258SP \$3.50.

*Hola, Doctor (Hello Doctor).* Rookie Reader Level A story of a young boy's trip to the doctor. Item #Cp-7092 \$4.95.

We could learn a lot from  
crayons:



Some are sharp, some are pretty,  
some are dull, some have weird  
names, and all are different  
colors . . . but they all have to  
learn to live in the same box.

(Accenting - Continued from page 3)

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## Diversity Calendar

### August 2001

- 1<sup>st</sup> *Emancipation Day* - Trinidad and Tobago. Celebrates the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833.
- 9<sup>th</sup> *International Day of the World's Indigenous People*. Commemorates the anniversary of the first day of the meeting in 1992 of the working group on Indigenous Populations of the Subcommittee of Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.
- 12<sup>th</sup> *Jammashdami* - Hindu. A new moon festival during the month of Bhadrapada, celebrated in honor of Lord Krishna. For Hindus, this day is a fast day until the new moon is sighted.
- 15<sup>th</sup> *Assumption Day* - Christian. Observance commemorates the taking of the Virgin Mary's body and soul into heaven.
- Korean Liberation Day*. In North Korea, marks the surrender of Japan in 1945, ending World War II. In South Korea, it marks the creation of an independent government in 1948.
- 18<sup>th</sup> *Paryushana* - Jain. Celebrated for 8 - 10 days in the month of Bhadrapada. Celebration focuses on 10 cardinal virtues: forgiveness, clarity, simplicity, contentment, truthfulness self-restraint, fasting, detachment, humility, and continence.
- 21<sup>st</sup> *Ganesh Chaturthi* - Hindu. Day of offering to Lord Ganesh, god of wisdom, success, and remover of obstacles.
- 26<sup>th</sup> *Women's Equality Day* - United States. Honors the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution in 1920, granting women the right to vote.
- 31<sup>st</sup> *Solidarity Day* - Poland. Commemorates the date in 1980 when the first Polish labor union, Solidarity, was formed at the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk.

### September 2001

#### Hispanic Heritage Month

- 3<sup>rd</sup> *Labor Day* - United States. Honors working people and the contribution of labor.
- 9<sup>th</sup> *Grandparents' Day* - United States. Honors all grandparents.



### September 2001 - (Continued)

- 15<sup>th</sup> *Hispanic Heritage Month begins* - U.S.
- Keiro no hi* - Japan. Respect for the Aged Day. A national holiday honoring the elderly and celebrating their longevity.
- Octoberfest* - Germany. A two-week long harvest celebration observed by feasting, drinking, music, dance, and folk customs.
- 17<sup>th</sup> *Citizenship Day* - U.S. Honors the people from other countries who become U.S. citizens each year, and the anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787.
- Rosh Hashanah* - Jewish. Marks the beginning of the Jewish New Year and commemorates the creation of the world.
- 23<sup>rd</sup> *National Deaf Awareness Week* - U. S.
- Shubun no hi* - Japan. Celebrates autumn and family ancestry.
- 26<sup>th</sup> *Yom Kippur* - Jewish. The Jewish Day of Atonement is the holiest and most solemn day on the Jewish calendar.
- 28<sup>th</sup> *Confucius's Birthday* - China and Taiwan. Celebrates the birth of the teacher Confucius in 551 B.C.E.

### October 2001

#### National Disability Employment Awareness Month

- 2<sup>nd</sup> *Sukkot* - Jewish. 8-day festival commemorating the divine protection given to Israelites during their 40 years of wandering through the desert.
- 8<sup>th</sup> *Columbus Day* - U.S. Commemorates the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas.
- 9<sup>th</sup> *Simchat Torah* - Jewish. Means "rejoicing in the Torah." Celebrates the conclusion of the public reading of the Torah.
- 11<sup>th</sup> *National Coming Out Day* - U.S. A day of visibility for the gay and lesbian community.
- 16<sup>th</sup> *Bosses Day* - U.S.
- 24<sup>th</sup> *United Nations Day* - U.N. Commemorates the birth of the United Nations organization.
- 25<sup>th</sup> *Chong Yang* - China. Family remembrance day on which families visit the graves of ancestors.
- 28<sup>th</sup> *Reformation Day* - Protestant Christian
- 31<sup>st</sup> *Halloween* - U.S.

Source: *Honoring Differences*. Professional Development Group, Inc. 2000.



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