

<b>Topic</b>	Accent discrimination and accent bias in school and the workplace	<b>Duration</b>	90 minutes
<b>Type</b>	Lesson Plan		
<b>CEFR level</b>	B2		

### GOALS/PURPOSE/AIMS

- Raise students' awareness about accent discrimination and provide reflection on the issue.
- Provide an opportunity for listening comprehension practice by watching authentic videos about accent discrimination.
- Help students develop their lexical resource through reading an authentic text and vocabulary work related to accent discrimination.
- Provide an opportunity for students to practice and develop their use of English skills (grammar and vocabulary) at B2 level within the context of accent discrimination.

### MATERIALS/RESOURCES USED

Forbes magazine article “Accent Discrimination Is Still A Pervasive Issue In The Workplace, Research Finds” by Janice Gassam Asare

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/janicegassam/2022/11/18/accent-discrimination-is-still-a-pervasive-issue-in-the-workplace-research-finds/>

Video “Language and Prejudice: How Accent Bias Harms People and Societies” Video by Unbounded Education

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iz3K98jPTzk>

Video “We stigmatize accents, but language belongs to everyone” Video by PBS NewsHour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoOLBi8XL7I>

### PROCEDURES (STRUCTURE)

---

#### **Warm up (5 minutes):**

**Focus questions discussions** – Teacher asks the class:

- What do you think of when you hear the word “accent”?
- Do you think people judge others based on their accents? Why or why not?

#### **Lead-in (10 minutes):**

Teacher asks students to discuss the following opinion statements in pairs or small groups (whether they agree or disagree with each statement and why):

- People with strong accents are often misunderstood.
- Some accents sound more professional or educated than others.
- It’s fair to judge someone’s intelligence based on their accent.
- People should try to change their accent to fit in better.
- Accent discrimination is just as serious as other forms of discrimination.

**Video Activity 1 (25 minutes)**

Teacher pre-teaches words and phrases such as “accent discrimination”, “accentism”, “accent bias”. Teacher tells students they are going to watch a video about accent discrimination (Video “Language and Prejudice: How Accent Bias Harms People and Societies” Video by Unbounded Education <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iz3K98jPTzk>)

1. Students watch the beginning of the video (0:00 to 1:30) and answer: *What are they going to discuss in this video?*
2. Students watch the rest of the video and answer the questions:
  - What is code-switching?
  - What is African-American Vernacular English (AAVE)?
  - What are the stereotypes associated with AAVE?
  - What are the stereotypes associated with the accents of dominant groups?
3. Extension questions for discussions:
  - Why do you think some accents are seen as more “prestigious” than others?
  - Have you ever experienced or witnessed accent discrimination? What happened?
  - How can we reduce accent discrimination in society?

**Reading and Use of English Activity (40 minutes)**

To bridge the contexts, teachers may talk about or ask students about accent discrimination in schools and then companies/workplace.

Teacher asks students if they know anything about Forbes magazine, shows them the website, and tells them they are going to work on an article from it.

“Accent Discrimination Is Still A Pervasive Issue In The Workplace, Research Finds” by Janice Gassam Asare

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/janicegassam/2022/11/18/accent-discrimination-is-still-a-pervasive-issue-in-the-workplace-research-finds/>

**1. Students read the first paragraph and fill in the gaps with the correct adjectives or nouns below:**

young	industrial	pervasive	unemployable
similar	prestige	intelligence	

A new study from Sutton Trust indicates that accent discrimination is still a (1) \_\_\_\_\_ issue. The study looked at the experiences of 17-18-year-old university applicants, 18-21-year-old university students and (2) \_\_\_\_\_ professionals between the ages of 21-24. The study participants were all within the United Kingdom. The research found that there was “accent (3)\_\_\_\_\_” for those who spoke what is sometimes referred to as the “Queen’s English.” The researchers also found that there was accent bias for participants from (4) \_\_\_\_\_ cities like Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham, which are areas that are considered to be working-class within England. Both ethnic minority accents of Afro-Caribbeans as well as Indians also experienced bias. (5)\_\_\_\_\_ findings have been revealed in previous studies within the United States. One study found that within the Lewiston-Auburn area of Maine there was accent discrimination against those with African accents.

The researcher noted that “those with perceived African accents are seen to be the Lewiston-Auburn area archetype of African refugees and migrants...being assumed to have little education, job skills, (6)\_\_\_\_\_, and trustworthiness within the workplace.” In that same study, the non-white individuals that were perceived to have English language barriers were believed to be (7)\_\_\_\_\_.

**2. Students do a key word transformation exercise and then read the second paragraph to check their answers:**

**Key word transformation activity**

Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given. You can use up to 5 words, including the word given.

1. Accent discrimination is a type of language-related discrimination.

**FALLS**

Accent discrimination \_\_\_\_\_ language-related discrimination.

2. Employers might not hire someone because of unconscious bias.

**DECIDE**

Employers \_\_\_\_\_ not to hire someone because of unconscious bias.

3. “English-only” signs are illegal unless speaking only English is necessary for the job.

**UNLESS**

“English-only” signs are illegal \_\_\_\_\_ necessary for the job.

4. Employees with non-native accents may experience bias in performance evaluations.

**EXPERIENCING**

Employees with non-native accents may \_\_\_\_\_ in performance evaluations.

5. A foreign accent can make a person seem less truthful.

**SEEM**

A foreign accent can \_\_\_\_\_ less truthful.

6. A Filipino nurse said her director humiliated her because of her thick accent.

**INDICATES**

A Filipino nurse \_\_\_\_\_ her director humiliated her because of her thick accent.

7. She sued her hospital for national origin discrimination.

**ENDED**

She \_\_\_\_\_ her hospital for national origin discrimination.

8. Accent discrimination can appear as hostility in the workplace.

**SHOW**

Accent discrimination can \_\_\_\_\_ as hostility in the workplace.

**The second paragraph:**

Within the United States, accent discrimination falls under language-related discrimination, which is protected under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Language discrimination can show up in a number of different ways in the workplace: Employers may decide not to hire a job candidate because of an unconscious perception that the candidate is not qualified or doesn't "fit" the job role. Accent bias can also show up in the form of "English-only" signs, which are illegal, unless speaking only English is necessary to perform the job. Employees with non-native accents may also experience bias when it comes to performance evaluations. Those rating the job performance of non-native speakers may unconsciously rate them as less favorable. One study from the University of Chicago found that a foreign accent makes a person seem less truthful. Accent discrimination may also show up as hostility in the workplace. In one case a Filipino nurse indicates that her director gave her negative feedback and humiliated her because of her thick accent. She ended up suing her hospital for national origin discrimination.

**Answer Key**

1. falls under
2. may decide
3. unless speaking only English is
4. end up experiencing bias
5. cause a person to seem
6. indicates that
7. ended up suing
8. show up

**3. Students read the third paragraph and complete it with a word from the box:**

Fill in the gaps with one word from the box:

outsider	nobody	individual	explain	immigrated	factors
discrimination	mislabeled	anonymous	intonation	embarrassed	

One educator who \_\_\_\_\_ to the United States in the 1980s shared her experiences with accent bias but preferred to remain \_\_\_\_\_. “No matter how good of English, or no matter how much education I have...I have to justify my mere presence...\_\_\_\_\_ else is being asked to explain anything.” She went on to \_\_\_\_\_ that our accents are shaped by many different \_\_\_\_\_. “What we call ‘accent’ is a \_\_\_\_\_. What people refer to as an accent is actually linguistic \_\_\_\_\_. It comes from the language you have spoken the most...or during the first part of your life...accent is the way each \_\_\_\_\_ sounds.” For many foreign-born Americans, the feeling of being an \_\_\_\_\_ is ever-present. “I wasn’t aware that it was \_\_\_\_\_ initially,” the educator explains. “I was just \_\_\_\_\_ and it impacted me in my career when I started teaching because students were making fun of me.”

**4. Students read the last paragraph and answer the questions:**

- What does the text say about customer preferences and workplace policies?
- What happened to customer satisfaction rates when call centers were moved outside the United States?

- How can education and training help reduce accent bias in the workplace?
- Do you think accent bias is a common problem in your country or school?

**The last paragraph:**

There are several ways that employers can address and mitigate accent bias in the workplace. Overcoming this type of discrimination should take a multi-pronged approach. First, there needs to be more awareness around the issue. Those with native accents are often unaware of the pervasive bias that those with perceived foreign accents experience. Even when customers may seem to prefer Native-English speakers, customer wants and desires cannot and should not dictate workplace policies and practices. Research indicates that call center customer satisfaction rates dropped when the call center moved outside of the United States. Those making hiring and employment decisions should understand that customer preference is not a permissible reason for discrimination. In addition to ensuring that there is education and training around our inherent accent biases, it is vital for workplace practices, including hiring processes, to be as standardized and objective as possible.

**Video Activity 2 (10 minutes)**

Teacher checks understanding/pre-teaches the word “stigma” and tells students that in this second short video (3:19 minutes) they will watch someone talking about accent discrimination.

Video “We stigmatize accents, but language belongs to everyone” Video by PBS NewsHour  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoOLBi8XL7I>

Students watch the video and answer the questions:

- What does he say about “accent reduction” or “accent elimination”?
- Why does he say that he probably has a bit of a foreign accent in every language he speaks?
- According to the speaker, what is accent discrimination about?

Teacher checks the answers with a whole class discussion.

#### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

---

By the end of the lesson students will:

- Develop awareness of accent bias and accent discrimination and its impact.
- Demonstrate improved listening comprehension through engagement with authentic video content.
- Expand their vocabulary related to accent discrimination and use it accurately in context.
- Practice and develop their grammar and vocabulary skills at B2 level through targeted exercises and productive tasks.
- Reflect on the issue of accent discrimination and express their opinions confidently in discussions or written responses.

**ASSESSMENT/REFLECTION**

---

**Follow-up task: students write an essay about accent discrimination**

Write a 200-word essay about accent discrimination. Your essay should include what accent discrimination is in your own words and explain why it is an important issue in today's world.