

Recognising accents

Level: C1+

Age: 15+

Time needed: 40 minutes

Materials needed: “Recognising accents” handout, frontal check slideshow, sound recordings, loudspeakers

Classroom organisation: frontal, individual

Notes for the teacher:

- Before conducting the activity, make sure you are adequately familiar with the features of the accents involved in the activity. The information provided in the “Read more” section at the end of the blurb is especially helpful in the case of this activity.

Procedure:

1. Make it clear that you will be using the word “accent” in its wider sense. In its everyday meaning, “accent” refers to “foreign accent” (to speak “with an accent” means that your pronunciation displays recognisable non-native features), but here the word will be used synonymously with “pronunciation variety”, i.e., every pronunciation variety (native and non-native varieties alike!) will be called an “accent”.
2. As a lead-in, you might want to play the following video (or extracts from it) to raise the students’ interest before the activity.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyyT2jmVPAk>
3. Elicit the importance of being familiar with the characteristic features of different native accents of English. Make sure that the students understand that they will find the various accents more comprehensible if they know what to expect to hear from native speakers of those accents.
4. Pre-teach the different features with the help of the slideshow and the handout. Demonstrate the features, and make sure the students know what to expect to hear during the listening phase. Out of the two reference accents (Received Pronunciation or General American), it is advisable to start with the one that the students are more familiar with. The only IPA symbol the students need to be familiar with in order to be able to follow the discussion is the schwa /ə/.
5. Before playing the recordings, tell the students to familiarise themselves with the transcripts on the handout.
6. The students should identify the accents of the six speakers, using the info in the tables on the handout. Play each sample twice (the links to the recordings can be found in the

“Recognising accents” handout) and ask the students to underline the words from which they have recognised the accent if they can point them out.

7. Check the answers. (If necessary, replay the parts from the recordings from which the accent can be identified – the key words are highlighted in the key to the “Recognising accents” handout.)
8. Optional follow-up or homework: “Accents quiz”.