

Brits feel fake when 'poshing up' accents

July 8 2014, by Mike Addelman

Some Brits with regional accents see themselves as frauds when they change their accent to cope with social situations, according to a University of Manchester linguist.

Though accent modification is common, Dr Alex Baratta says it can threaten the way we feel about our [personal identity](#), often causing anger and frustration.

Workplace meetings with 'posh' sounding senior managers, he says, can be especially stressful for an individual with a more pronounced regional accent.

Job interviews, speaking to lecturers and even speaking on the phone are other areas of concern, he says.

Dr Baratta's research is based on an ongoing survey of children, students and staff from different institutions and schools, involving 98 people so far.

It reveals that while most accept the practice, a third of respondents say they feel like a fraud when they consciously modify their accent.

Though accent modification and the relationship between accent and identity are well researched, it is the first time anyone has attempted to investigate how accent modification in Britain affects the way we feel about ourselves.

The researcher, based at The University's Manchester Institute of Education said: "Many Brits consciously modify their accent in [social situations](#) as a means to create a better impression.

"While this is a common practice, we should not assume that it is accepted by all speakers without issue.

"As part of my ongoing research, many participants see accent modification as synonymous with selling out and a clear threat to their sense of self.

"This is why 'accentism' should be taken seriously as a problem which affects many of us.

"Clearly, most people modify their accent not because they lack pride in it, quite the opposite in fact. It's actually because they fear the negative perceptions others might have of them if they don't, especially in work-related contexts."

Dr Baratta argues that potential employers should state in writing that applicants' accents will not be used against them.

He also says application forms should request applicants to 'state their accent', perhaps the last taboo, alongside other identities such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, age and race.

He added: "We should acknowledge that any form of workplace discrimination, to include accentism, should not be tolerated in a society which seeks to be more inclusive.

"This is especially true in education, where teachers in particular may feel pressure to modify their regional accent in order to be perceived in a more positive light by students and fellow staff alike.

"My point is perfectly illustrated by an Ofsted inspector who last year told a Cumbrian teacher working in a Berkshire school to sound 'more southern'."

Examples revealed by Dr Baratta's research include:

- A teacher from Rossendale "felt disgusted" with himself for modifying his accent at a job interview.
- A Mancunian woman feels "fake, angry and upset" for modifying her accent with her lecturers, and believes she is "betraying" who she really is.
- A Liverpoolian stated that accent modification, mostly practiced in business contexts, leaves him feeling "whipped."

Provided by University of Manchester

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