

Teachers feel pressure to 'standardise' their accents in class

January 20 2015, by Deborah Linton



Larkmead School. Credit: CC-BY-SA-2.5,2.0,1.0

Teachers feel under pressure to change their accents to be understood in the classroom, according to a study carried out at The University of Manchester.

Dr Alex Baratta, a lecturer in linguistics, says that trainee teachers feel they are 'selling out' by neglecting their regional accents in favour of more 'standard' classroom speaking voices.

Last year Dr Baratta conducted the first study into how accent modification in Britain affects the way people feel about themselves. He

found that many people felt like fakes for 'poshing up' their accents to fit in to certain work and [social situations](#), threatening their personal identities and often causing anger and frustration.

His latest study explores accents in the classroom and examines the way regional accents affected teachers in their work.

In interviews with trainee teachers with Northern accents, Dr Baratta said almost all of his interviewees admitted that their accent had been picked-up on by mentors, leading to too many teaching staff feeling they had to neglect their 'true voice' and modify accents that were somehow deemed inappropriate for education.

Dr Baratta said: "The teaching profession is one which relies on a clear voice which is easy to understand, perhaps more so at the primary level when teaching phonics. This of course is a completely valid point. However, it can be the case that trainee teachers with regional accents are being made to feel that, somehow, their accents equate to speaking unclearly. There is a need for a balance to be struck, ensuring that students can understand and thus learn from teachers, while not completely discarding the unique richness that comes with [regional accents](#)"

As well as the suggestion that they were unclear because of their speaking voice, some reported being made to feel inferior, with one student claiming a mentor had laughed at her Eccles accent and another relaying how an interviewer threatened to stop an interview because of the interviewee's regional accent.

Participants in the study also said they felt that the pressure to modify their accents equated to losing their identity. Some even suggested that British accents should be made a protected category.

Dr Baratta added: "The findings are particularly pertinent in Britain where we are a melting pot of cultures and yet our next generation of teachers arguably do not feel they can be true to who they are when they speak to a class.

In total, 16 teachers were interviewed –11 [trainee teachers](#), (eight primary level and three secondary level) and five qualified teachers (from university, secondary school and English as a Foreign Language disciplines).

The study is a qualitative research study.

Provided by University of Manchester

Citation: Teachers feel pressure to 'standardise' their accents in class (2015, January 20) retrieved 11 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-01-teachers-pressure-standardise-accents-class.html>

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