St Augustine's Centre, Halifax, UK

English for Life in the UK

Season 2 - Episode 28 - Regional Accents and Dialects in the UK

July 2021

Mark Hello, and welcome to the podcast **English for Life in the UK.** This podcast is for those people who want to improve their English by listening to native English speakers, talking in an everyday way, about a range of different subjects.

Today I'm joined by John. Hi, John, how are you?

John I'm good, Mark. Nice to see you again.

Mark Likewise[1]. And today we're going to talk about regional accents. Now, as with most languages, there are different accents in different parts of the countries where that language is spoken. So, it's partly to do with the geography - where the people are, in that country - but it also is influenced a bit by things like social class, and people's educational experience, as well.

But you do get distinctive accents and certainly, within the United Kingdom, there really are a lot of different accents, so today, we're going to talk a bit about those. We're going to illustrate some of those accents. I've managed to have conversations with people with different accents and I've found some clips that we've been able to use, to illustrate some of the different accents that we've got. So that's the idea behind today's episode. And we're starting with John. So, John - tell us a bit about where you're from and what your accent is.

John I'm ... - I was born and raised in the West Riding[2] of Yorkshire - the west part of Yorkshire. And I have quite a strong West Yorkshire accent. Even within the county of Yorkshire[3], there are several different accents - even within Yorkshire. So there's the kind of West Yorkshire accent - mine. The South Yorkshire accent - in Sheffield, for example, is very strong, very distinctive; places like Hull, Middlesbrough to the north of the county, all have very distinctive accents, even within our county. So, it is even possible for people, from our part of the world, to tell where somebody's from to within, perhaps 10 or 15 miles, due to their accent.

Mark Yes. I think, probably, for most people, who are not native English speakers, we need them to just pick out some of the significant differences. So, certainly, I would say, John - you have a classic Yorkshire accent, that would certainly be recognisable to somebody like me, who comes from the south of England, and has an accent [from], kind of, around the London area. I'll tell you a bit more about my accent later.

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[1] saying ‘likewise’ is a way of saying you agree or or think or feel the same way as the other person you are talking to.

[2] Riding - the former name given to an administrative area of Yorkshire which was previously, itself, one large County,

[3] Yorkshire was one large county until it was officially split into North, South and West Yorkshire, to make the areas more similar to other county sizes, though they still vary significantly.

So John, just tell me, I know you've got a really good story to tell and it seems to suggest that the Yorkshire accent, somehow helped to win the Second World War. Explain that one, John.

John (*Laughing*). Yeah [Yes] - that's quite a bold claim, Mark. But, yes - I came across a very interesting story when I was doing a bit of research about the history of Halifax, which, obviously, is where we're based - in St Augustine's. And this centres[4] on a man called Wilfred Pickles. He was a working class man from Halifax - he were [was][5] born and raised just a few streets away from St Augustine's, next to the current Calderdale College, in Halifax. He was the son of a builder. He got his first job when he were [was] 12 years old, so a working class family, in Halifax. But Wilfred was always interested in drama and stage, and things like that - and he went on to his drama career, to eventually work for the BBC.

Now, he initially worked on the *Northern Service*, where his Northern accent wasn't too much of a problem. But as the ... on the advent[6] of World War II, obviously, as you will know, the German armies, the Nazis' armies, conquered France, Belgium and Holland. They were then able to broadcast directly to the people of the United Kingdom, which were [was] a very big problem, obviously, for the British authorities during the war. Because the German propaganda, coming over the radio waves, [was] interfering with the message that the BBC wanted to send to the British public. And one of the problems it had: that the German broadcaster was speaking, in what we would call the "**received pronunciation**". They'd perhaps learnt their English before the war, perhaps at the universities in the South of England, and they were able to imitate the traditional BBC-sounding voices. So, in order to counteract this - a fellow called Brendan Bracken, who was the Information Minister[7], suggested that they should use a regional accent and the accent they chose was the Yorkshire accent of Mr Wilfred Pickles, because they were convinced that the Germans and the German propaganda agents - while they would be able to imitate the **received pronunciation** - standard English - there was no way they'd be able to imitate a broad Yorkshire accent. So Mr Pickles went on to read the news, and read all the news bulletins on the BBC national service. And this was the idea, people would be able to understand his broad Yorkshire accent, but that German broadcasters would not be able to imitate him. So he carried on broadcasting.

It did cause a little bit of consternation[8], and some upset; there were quite a few people who were writing letters to the BBC, complaining that this broad Yorkshire accent were [was] broadcasting the news, at the time.

But he did very well out of it, did Wilfred. He went on to be a very successful broadcaster, not just during the war, but after the war. Effectively, he went on to become the first game show host. He broadcast game shows, things on BBC radio for many, many years, after World War II, with, sometimes audiences in excess of 20 million. Amazing, when we think about that today. We don't get anything on the BBC that 20 million people would listen to. He also went on to have a successful film career. He starred in particular a famous film called "Billy Liar" which was set and filmed in

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[4] to 'centre on' something means to focus on or be about that thing or, in this case, person

[5] in previous episodes we have pointed out that John often uses 'were' when the Stanard English would be 'was' - this is one example of his Yorkshire dialect.

[6] the 'advent' of something is the arrival or coming into being of some thing, event or person. It comes from the biblical reference to the coming into the world of Jesus.

[7] A Government minister of state. A Minister may also be a title for a representative of the Church.

[8] consternation means a feeling of anxiety or dismay at something unexpected.

Bradford. So yeah - a Yorkshire accent contributed to the victory in World War II. A nice story - and very nice, as I said, that he were [was] born and raised just a very few streets away from our centre, at St. Augustine's, in the North of Halifax.

Mark Yes - that's a lovely story, John and one that I didn't know before. So, tell us - is there anything else you can tell us about the Yorkshire accent, that you think people would be interested in?

John Well - as with ..... I think we'll be talking about the Liverpool accent a little later on: the Liverpool accent was heavily influenced by Irish immigration, from the mid-19th century onwards. So, the Liverpool accent is very distinctive - almost in some ways, closer to an Irish accent, than a traditional Northern English accent. Similarly, from the other side of the UK, the Yorkshire accent has always been influenced, over the centuries, initially from, effectively, the Viking accent. So, many of the words that we have in our dialects, the way that we pronounce things, are related to Norwegian and Danish. So, for example - if I were ... an informal way of saying "thank you" in Yorkshire or the North East, I would say "Taa". So instead of saying "thank you", I would say "Taa". That's from the Danish or Norwegian, which is "Takk" or "thank you".

Another word that we used to use as children, growing up in Yorkshire: instead of saying "playing", we'd say "laikin' "[9] [laiking] or "leckin" and again that is from the Norse word "*leika*", to play . Our accent and our dialect is shot through[10] with lots of influences from Scandinavian languages, which were prevalent in this part of the UK, hundreds of years ago.

One of the things that people in other parts of the UK and particularly, people who are new to learning English have a lot of trouble with, is that we use a lot of contractions in the North and especially, in Yorkshire. So we would use something which linguists refer to as the "secondary contraction" - so, it's ... obviously - you don't say
"I would not do that", you would say,
"I wouldn't (do that)". But, in Yorkshire, we might say
"I wu'n't do that" - so, again, instead of saying
"I shouldn't do that", we would say "I shu'n't do that".

Quite often, as well, we also .... something which quite often infuriates people in the rest of the UK - we commonly drop the definite article - so, for example, Mark - if you asked me what I am doing tonight, I would say "I'm going to t'pub" I would not say "I am going to the pub" - I would say "I'm going to t'pub".

So a lot of contraction, a lot of abbreviation. We also commonly drop our aitches [the letter "h", at the beginning of words]. So - it will be very common for me to say "I'm from 'Alifax" as opposed to me saying "I'm from Halifax". Or "I'm going to 'Uddersfield" as opposed to "I'm going to Huddersfield". So, a lot of contractions and a lot of abbreviation.

Mark That's really interesting, John. One of the things I notice - particularly, this is one of the strong differences between most Southern accents and most Northern accents - is the way in which the letter "a" gets pronounced in some words - as to whether it's a short or a long "a".
So, I would say, "later on this evening, I'm going to have a nice hot bath" (*pronounced barth, long "a")"* whereas John - what would you say?

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[9] laikin' - often in informal speech the final "g" is not sounded

[10] to be ‘shot through with’ something means it contains a lot of it or is very noticeable

John I'd say "later on this evening, I'm going to have a nice hot bath" (*short "a"*) - so there's a divide between those pronunciations - [it] is between the south and the north.

Mark There is, there is - and I would say, "in my youth I used to like to dance" (*long 'a')* - for you John?

John I would say "In my youth, I used to like to dance" (*short 'a'*).

Mark So we're going to go on to talk to a number of people from different parts of the United Kingdom. So we've talked here about - there is a difference in accent. So the accent is how the word is pronounced and how it is heard - as opposed to dialect. And dialect is where, actually the words change - so you end up with a new word, or a modified version of the word, which is a distinctive dialect - so that means a language within the language if you like, in a particular area. We've got examples of both different accents and different dialects, that we're going to illustrate in the next part of the podcast,

John We're going to be introduced to Brummies, Yam-yams, Geordies, and Scousers.

Mark We are. And also, we've got our friend - your friend and mine, John - Christine, who is from Scotland. And I've managed to find a classic poem which was both written by a Welsh man and we've got it performed by a Welshman. And that is how we're going to end the episode.

So thank you very much for your time, John. We'll speak again soon.

John Thank you. See you soon, Mark.

(Music) (11:58)

Mark So, in this next section, there are some short interviews and recordings with people from different parts of the United Kingdom. Listen out and see if you can notice the difference in the accents and you will also come across some new words and phrases, depending on the dialect used by these people.

And now, I'm joined by Christine - who is familiar to many of you who are regular listeners to the podcast. But for anybody who doesn't know you, Christine - just tell us a little bit about yourself.

Christine Well, I am Scottish and I come from Fife - that's where I was brought up - that's just north of Edinburgh. I have lived in England, now, longer than I lived in Fife. In fact, I've lived in Yorkshire, now, for longer than I've lived in Fife, so that's means that my accent has softened a lot or changed a lot. I've also - because I teach English - developed a habit of trying to speak quite clearly.

Mark I would say you still have a distinctive, recognisable Scottish accent certainly, to me.

Christine I think that's true. Certainly in England, people know I'm Scottish. But when I go to Scotland, some people think I'm English.

Mark So give us a couple of examples of Scottish phrases or sentences that might be typical.

Christine Och - I don't know what to say - but I can think of things that are different, here. I mean, I say "I'm often late, amn't I?" whereas you would say: "I'm often late, aren't I?"

So we actually use different grammar.

I mean there's the corny[11] ones, the ridiculously corny ones like :
"there's a braw bricht moonlicht nicht tonicht" [12]
Nobody ever said that.
But you say "braw" when you're saying something looks nice - you know, and if something's "bright", it's "bricht" - you know. And you don't talk about lakes: you talk about "lochs".

Mark So that was Christine, with her Scottish accent and some Scottish phrases. You'll notice particularly, when she said "Och, I don't know what to say" - well the "och" there is a very typical, Scottish exclamation - it's a surprise - and it doesn't mean anything and it's just used in the same way that I might say:
"Well, I don't know what to say" ... or "Oh, I don't know what to say". She uses "Och".

In this next section I talk to Bernice and Eddie who come from the North Western part of the United Kingdom: one of them from Manchester, and the other, from Liverpool.

Right - well, hello and welcome. Perhaps you two would like to introduce yourselves?

Bernice OK - My name's Bernice Hayes. I'm a volunteer at St. Augustine's. We deliver food. And I'll hand over to my husband.

Eddie Hello, good afternoon. My name's Eddie and I'm also a volunteer at St Augustine's.

Mark And where are you two from originally?

Bernice I'm from Manchester, which means I'm a Lancastrian[13].

Eddie And I'm from Liverpool which means I'm a Liverpudlian or a Scouser[14].

Mark Have you got something that each of could say that illustrates your accent?

Bernice Yes. I'll go first if that's okay.

Mark That's fine, Bernice.

Bernice OK. It's cracking flags[15] and I'm sweating cobs.

Mark (*Laughing*) That's great - do you want to explain what it means?

Bernice Yes. It's very hot outside, so I'm perspiring,

Mark That's right. That's a real good one that - a real Mancunian[16] phrase. Have you got another one?

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[11] corny - predictable, cliché, or every day, even exaggerated, but not true to real life

[12] there's a beautiful, bright, moonlit night, tonight"

[13] Lancastrian - from the county of Lancashire

[14] the name ‘scouser’ is thought to come from the name of a traditional dish or meal from that area

[15] cracking flags - this is referring to flagstones (not cloth flags) which intends to signify the sun is so hot it can crack the pavements.

[16] Mancunian - from Manchester

Bernice Yes I have - wait a minute. Oh: "Mek [Make] us a brew - I'm spitting feathers".

Mark Now, I have no idea what that means.

Bernice Make us [me] a cup of tea because I am very thirsty.

Mark Right.

Bernice Is that OK?

Mark That's great - thank you, Bernice. Now, Eddie - what about you and your Scouse accent?

Eddie Well, I really haven't prepared any phrases or sayings - I've got definitions of different words and how they're used by Scousers. I've got things like - if you are calling somebody who is a friend of yours, a little bit silly, if you are just chiding them - you'd call them "a soft lad". It's not an insult, to say "you're a soft lad" to a friend, but if you were calling somebody you didn't know, "a soft lad" it would be quite an insult - you'd be saying they are unintelligent.

Talking to a Mother, grandmother or a female teacher - anybody - a woman of authority - and you are friendly to them - they are a "queen" - so you would say: "Hello Queen, are you OK?" - or [to an elder woman], "are you OK?" But in Scouse, you say "Alright, Queen?"

Mark (Laughing) That's brilliant. I see you can put the accent on - you can make it a bit stronger when you want to, can't you, Eddie?

Eddie Oh, aye - I'm dead[17] good at that.

Mark That's brilliant - thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to add? Anything? Any bit of wisdom about accents and how they change or ...

Bernice I just think it's really important to register them, because I think it's who we are. Our [My] accent is who I am.

Eddie And in my age, it was looked down upon[18] to have a regional accent. So when I was at preparatory school we had elocution lessons[19]. So that's how I have a hybrid of "Queen's English" with a taste of Scouse.

Mark Yes - Yes. I think now - it's interesting isn't it? - in the media and other places, they actually make quite an effort to actually have regional accents quite often now, but as you say, in the past, that was very unusual.

In this next section, you will hear two women who come from the central part of England. We often call it the Midlands. One of them is from Birmingham - she also calls

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[17] dead good - informally, particularly in the North of England, "dead" can replace "very" to stress the adjective that follows.

[18] look down on - to disapprove of; to be frowned at; carries an element of social class distaste

[19] elocution lessons are used to teach someone to talk in particular way - usually '**Received Pronunciation**' or the standard form of the language, also called the **Queen's English** - see the 'Language Support section of this podcast.

it "Brum" - and that is England's second largest city, after London. And the other one is from what is called The Black Country, which is an area just north of Birmingham, but both of them are from the middle part of England. See if you notice the differences in their accents.

Tracy My name's Tracy. I was born in Birmingham - Brum, as it's affectionately known, is one of the UK's greenest cities with over 8,000 acres and 600 parks and open spaces. The city hosts over 50 festivals each year, including: the Moseley Festival[20], the Flatpack Film Festival, the Fierce Art Festival and the massive Birmingham International Jazz festival.

Leanne My name's Leanne and I live in Dudley. which is part of The Black Country. People in Birmingham refer to Black Country folk as "Yam-Yams" because they say: "Yowam" or "Yoware", meaning "you am" or "you are".

Mark Next - we have an interview done with a man from the North East of England, around the city of Newcastle. People from this area are known as Geordies[21].

Woman Interviewer:
What did you want in your home when you were setting up in the early sixties? *(1960s)*
Man responding:
You know - it's funny - but the kids now they want everything, straight away. We were happy to get a few sticks of furniture and pay weekly for it and then get a few bits of carpet and you rented your house. And you'd never ever have thought you'd buy a house - I mean, that seemed .... nobody bought a house, in them [those] days. You bought bits of furniture. Then we got a black and white television, which were [was] rented. That was a luxury. We were happy. You were happy with what you'd got, because you didn't know anything else - you didn't know anything different.

Mark So that was a Geordie accent - you may have noticed the way in which he said "*straight away*" *(in accent)* rather than "straight away", which is what I would say. And he says
"*naybody*" rather than "nobody".

That recording comes from a series of recordings, done by the British Library, of different regional accents and you can find much [many] more of those, at their website at Bl.uk[22]

This next one also comes from there and is a Northern Irish accent - an interview with two people about discrimination that disabled people face. Again, listen out for the distinctive accents being used.

First Man speaking:
"One of the things is access - because, as you say, that's covert discrimination - and that's a kind of ongoing issue really - I mean, society is terribly exclusive in that sense, isn't it - thoughtless?"

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[20] the Moseley festival is a jazz festival held in Birmingham each year

[21] the word 'Geordie' is thought to come from George Stephenson who invented a miner's lamp used in this part of the country

[22] www.bl.uk

Second Man speaking:
"I suppose if people haven't come up against it, they're not going to think about it? OK? So that's ... let's put that on the table, first. But yes - you are right, I mean society does exclude the disabled and when we're talking access, people get hung up[23] on wheelchair access and they think if they put up a ramp outside the building and a disabled toilet, they have the thing sorted out. Well, that's very, very far from the truth, because what about access to information? Like, for example, producing pamphlets on audio cassette[24] for blind people."

Mark So that was a Northern Ireland accent. taken from the British Library website. They point out there that one of the distinctive things about that Irish accent is the way in which the letter "r" is emphasised in many words - so for example, the speaker talked about the "*firrrst*": with the strong "r"; whereas, I would say "first" and you would hardly notice the "r" in that.

Or *"sorrrted out"* whereas I would say "sorted out" so you would hardly notice the "r" in the way that I've said it, after a vowel. In Northern Ireland, they quite strongly emphasise that "r".

We're going to finish this section with one more accent and that is the Welsh accent: people coming from Wales. There is a Welsh language of its own, but also, when people in Wales are speaking English, they do so with quite a strong distinctive accent. What we've got here is a current Welsh actor, called Michael Sheen, reading a very famous poem by one of Britain's most famous poets, Dylan Thomas, and Dylan Thomas wrote this poem, it's called *Do not Go Gentle into that Good Night,* in 1947; and, it's about his father, fighting, trying to struggle against illness, to not die. Don't worry about understanding all the words in this poem - just let it wash over you, but also listen for the distinctive accents:

(Poem:[25])
Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night
[by Dylan Thomas]

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

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[23] hung up on = an informal way of saying "focus on", or concentrate on something, to the exclusion of other aspects of the subject under consideration

[24] audio cassette - this is referring to tape cassette, now an "old fashioned", pre-digital, way of recording and reproducing sound

[25]In *Country Sleep, And Other Poems* (Dent, 1952)

Grave men, near death who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray,
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

*(**Music**) (26:43)*

Mark **Language Support**

This is the part of the podcast where I choose some words or phrases from the episode and talk about them. Now, today, I'm just going to focus on one particular phrase that John used, because it's really at the heart of what this episode is all about.

He was talking about the period of the Second World War when the BBC was the main broadcaster - the main radio station. And he said, that they were using, what he called, was "**received pronunciation**". And he went on to then talk about how Wilfred Pickles was chosen because he had a different accent. The phrase "**received pronunciation"** means the **"accepted"** or **"approved" pronunciation** - it's the form of English that would be the most recognisable to most people and it's often also referred to as 'BBC English', because, in the early days, the BBC made sure they used a regular form of pronunciation that most people would understand. It's sometimes also referred to as the "Queen's English" - with the idea that the King or Queen would speak properly, in a standard way.

These days, we'd more often say 'standard English', and that's really to distinguish it from English with other accents and other dialects. Now, if you listen to my voice, I am quite close to what would be called standard English. Although, I also have some slight changes to my accent, due to where I was brought up. You would say, generally, that the South East of England is the place where standard English is most commonly spoken. London has a variety of accents and there is a very strong, Central/East London accent which is known as "cockney". And certainly I don't speak with a cockney accent and that wouldn't be regarded as being standard English.

(*29:25)*

Increasingly these days, the differences in regional accents and dialects are seen as just as valid as standard English. In fact, regional accents and those accents from a number of immigrant communities, are widely celebrated and used these days. And on television and the radio, these days, you will hear a wide variety of accents being used and that's why we thought this was a useful topic for this particular subject.

Obviously, we haven't covered English accents in other parts of the world - we've just looked at it, within the United Kingdom, and even here, we've left out some important other regional accents - but we've covered some of the main ones. Those of you who are regular listeners will be used to having heard John's Yorkshire accent, Christine's Scottish accent and my south east, or closer to standard English, accent.

I hope you've found this episode useful. If you want to get the transcript for this episode and all the other episodes and to find out more about the work of our charity, the St Augustine's Centre, and how to support and help us, stay listening for information about our website and email addresses. Otherwise, thank you very much for listening and I hope you have found this episode useful and we will be back with you fairly soon.

Goodbye for now.

(***Music***) *(31:29*)

You can get the transcript for this episode and all others - through our website:

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

That's also where you can find out how to support our work, including making a donation.

You can contact us by email; we have a specific email address for this podcast, which is:

englishforlifeintheUK@gmail.com

and there is also a general email address for the Centre:

info@staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

I'll spell out all of those:

So, the website: -s-t-a-u-g-u-s-t-i-n-e-s-c-e-n-t-r-e-h-a-l-i-f-a-x.org.uk

Org - that O-R-G.-U-K.

The email is: englishforlifeintheUK@gmail.com
And that's "English for" spelt: f-o-r - life in the uk.
And the general email - Info at:
info@ - is i-n-f-o (at), and then the same as the website address
staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

Thank you and be back with you again soon.

Ends* (33:56*)