

# The Ethics of Accent Modification

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Adults acquiring a new language often face challenges because their speech sounds different from those who acquired the language at an earlier age. Accents are an oft-cited factor in linguistic discrimination, and when non-native speakers are less intelligible or comprehensible than other speakers of the language, their ability to communicate effectively can be reduced. In many cases, non-native speakers seek targeted phonological instruction (also called “accent modification”) from trained professionals, including speech-language pathologists (SLPs). Although phonology is a core component of all oral language learning, many SLPs have criticized accent modification because they view it as an effort to force others to conform to perceived linguistic norms. This seminar will seek to provide a better understanding of best practices in accent modification and will directly address the concerns related to the ethical provision of these elective services.

## **Learner outcomes**

As a result of this presentation, the participant will be able to explain the nature of non-native accents and their connection to linguistic discrimination.

As a result of this presentation, the participant will be able to identify some concerns regarding the ethical provision of accent modification.

As a result of this presentation, the participant will be able to describe best practices for ethical accent modification.

**Presenter Bio:** Robert McKinney, M.A., CCC-SLP holds MAs in Communicative Disorders, International Relations, and Education. He is the lead SLP at the Sweetwater District, and at SDSU he teaches phonetics and supervises in their Accent and Communication Training Program. He speaks 6 languages and has worked with clients from over 80 countries. He is the author of [Here’s How to Do Accent Modification](#).

**Slideshow:** Slides are available following the presentation by emailing me at [rmckinney@sdsu.edu](mailto:rmckinney@sdsu.edu)

Accent Experts Speak: <https://youtu.be/JL6aldxeJf0>

Clients Discuss Accent Modification: <https://youtu.be/guGCZiJ9kRU>

Accent Modification Groups:

CORSPAN [www.corspan.org](http://www.corspan.org)

SLPs in Accent Modification Facebook Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/543299812453471/>

## **What is linguistic discrimination, and what is the SLP's role in effectively ameliorating this with accent modification clients?**

- Linguistic discrimination is a widespread and devastating phenomenon throughout the world. Persons may experience prejudice or discrimination when their speech sounds different from a perceived norm. Accent modification providers are on the front lines in the fight against this discrimination.
- The goal of accent modification is effective communication, which is a shared responsibility between speakers and listeners. Although accent modification is the current preferred term for SLPs, it is a misnomer since services do not focus on the accent itself. Instead, they focus on intelligibility, comprehensibility, naturalness, and other pillars of communication. Research has shown that “accentedness” (i.e., simply sounding different than a perceived norm) can be isolated from these other factors and should be embraced as a part of the beauty of linguistic diversity.
- Accent modification takes place around the globe. Services conducted in English are provided by native and non-native speakers of countless dialects of English by culturally and linguistically diverse providers. Most commonly, non-native clients seek services in English. Some clients speak a form of English that may not be understood well in different areas of the globe, such as a speaker of Nigerian English working in the U.S. A third client is the American seeking services to support pronunciation after relocating to a different area of the U.S.
- Adults acquire other languages differently than their mother tongue, and direct instruction and guidance make the process more narrowly targeted and efficient. Often accent modification in English is provided by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), who usually call it pronunciation instruction.
- Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) are highly trained communication experts, and accent modification is within their scope of practice.
- Services are elective. Clients should always make the choice in whether to seek services and how they are provided. An analogy would be transgender voice training, where services are provided to non-disabled clients who voluntarily seek non-medical speech services.
- While some clients seek services because they face personal or professional obstacles, others wish to improve their communication skills as self-development to reach their highest potential.
- Studies have demonstrated the efficacy of accent modification in increasing intelligibility, comprehensibility, confidence, and other factors essential for successful communication.
- With accent modification services, clients report improvement in their listening comprehension, promoting inclusion in their work, school, and community. When learning to produce spoken features of English for their community, they also learn to understand English speakers with more clarity and efficiency, providing them with the opportunity for more involvement and impact at work or school.
- Accent modification lessons never seek to eliminate someone's self, personality, or cultural identity. It is only when some features of a client's pronunciation interfere with effective communication, that services are appropriate.
- Accent modification providers have a strong understanding of the social and emotional factors involved when someone's speech sounds different from the community around them. We are sympathetic to their needs, and make it a priority to counsel our clients, advocate on their behalf, teach self-advocacy, and seek greater language diversity awareness in the community at large.
- We welcome any dialog on best practices and the role our services play in ameliorating linguistic discrimination, advocating for linguistic diversity, and providing effective services to our clients since these are at the very heart of our work.

Robert McKinney, MA, CCC-SLP  
Paula Gallay, MS, CCC-SLP  
January, 2021

## Accent Modification Resource Sheet 2022

### Overviews

- Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D., & Goodwin, J. M. (2010). *Teaching pronunciation: A course book and reference guide* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Derwing, T., & Munro, M. (2015). *Pronunciation fundamentals: Evidence-based perspectives for L2 teaching and research*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Ehrlich, S., Peter, A., (2013). *Teaching American English pronunciation*. Oxford University Press.
- Kimble-Fry, A., & ClearSpeak. (2001). *Perfect pronunciation: A guide for trainers and self-help students*. Sydney: ClearSpeak Pty Ltd.
- Kreidler, C. W. (1989). *The pronunciation of English: A course book in phonology*. Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell.
- McKinney, R. (2019). [\*Here's how to accent modification: a manual for speech-language pathologists\*](#). San Diego: Plural Publishing.
- Murphy, J., & University of Michigan Press. (2017). *Teaching the pronunciation of English: Focus on whole courses*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Murphy, J. (2017). *The Routledge handbook of contemporary English pronunciation*. London: Routledge.
- Reed, M., Levis, J. (2015). *The handbook of English pronunciation*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.

### Coursebooks for clients

- Cook, Ann (2012). *American accent training* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Barron's.
- Feinstein-Whittaker, M., & Lynda, K. W. (2008). *Rules by the sound*. Owings Mills, MD: Successfully Speaking.
- Grant, L. (2016). *Well said: Pronunciation for clear communication* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Lujan, B. (2016). *The American accent guide* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Salt Lake City: Lingual Arts.
- Meyers, C. M., & Holt, S. (2001). *Pronunciation for success: Student workbook*. Burnsville, MN: Aspen Productions.
- Miller, S. (2006). *Targeting pronunciation: Communicating clearly in English* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston: Thomson Heinle.
- Mosjin, L. (2016). *Mastering the American accent* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Barron's.

### Social Media

- SLPs in Accent Modification Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/543299812453471/>
- CORSPAN <https://www.facebook.com/findaspeechtrainer/>
- SLP Private Practice Beginners <https://www.facebook.com/groups/slp.private.practice.beginners/>
- The Accent Authority <https://www.facebook.com/The-Accent-Authority-232361463589909/>

### Internet Resources

- CORSPAN – Corporate Speech Pathology Network <http://www.corspan.org/>
- Rachel's English <https://www.youtube.com/user/rachelsenglish>
- Jennifer-English Pronunciation [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMM\\_hwyHxaI&list=PL0B58DCD9199D5668](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMM_hwyHxaI&list=PL0B58DCD9199D5668)
- English Accent Coach <https://www.englishaccentcoach.com/index.aspx>
- Speech Accent Archive <http://accent.gmu.edu/>
- Teaching Pronunciation: <https://helenfraser.com.au/wp-content/uploads/HF-Handbook.pdf>

## CEU Courses

### Speechpathology.com

Back to Basics: Accent Modification <https://www.speechpathology.com/slp-ceus/course/back-to-basics-accent-modification-9099>

Developing Your Business Accent: Tips & Tools for Offering Accent Modification Services <https://www.speechpathology.com/slp-ceus/course/developing-your-business-accent-tips-9145>

Accent Management: Approaches, Evidence, and Outcomes <https://www.speechpathology.com/slp-ceus/course/accent-management-approaches-evidence-and-8244>

### SpeechTherapypd.com

Accent Modification 101: Improving Communication Skills in Individuals Using Non-Native English and US Regional Dialects <https://courses.speechtherapypd.com/ets/store/item/?id=e060957f-724b-11e7-b7fa-005056a0372f>

## Training Programs

LDS (Lorna Sikorski & Associates): <https://www.ldsassoc.com/>

Institute of Language & Phonology (Compton): <https://800-language.com/>

Speech Advantage: <https://speechadvantage.com/about/>

ESL Rules LLC: <http://www.eslrules.com/>

## Journal

Journal of Second Language Pronunciation. John Benjamins. <https://benjamins.com/#catalog/journals/jslp/main>

## Apps

Speech Sounds Visualized <https://speechsoundsvisualized.org/>

VowelViz <https://completespeech.com/vowelvizpro/>

Sounds of Speech <https://soundsofspeech.uiowa.edu/home>

## Podcasts

<https://freshslp.com/podcast/an-interview-with-an-slp-who-specializes-in-accent-modification-part-1-ask-an-expert/>

<https://freshslp.com/podcast/an-interview-with-an-slp-who-specializes-in-accent-modification-part-2-ask-an-expert-2/>

## Video

Accent Experts Speak <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JL6aldxeJf0>