

Should People Go For Help to Reduce their Accents?



Over the years I have received calls from people asking me to help them reduce their accents or regionalisms. Sometimes it was for people in the acting profession, sometimes it was from people trying to advance in their professions, and other times it was from people saying that other people couldn't understand them. I have even gotten calls from employers looking for help for people in their workforce because their employee's accents were affecting business.

A foreign accent and a regionalism are different. It is important to understand that an accent can include different pronunciation of sounds, rhythm or vocabulary due to a language difference. A regionalism is a different pattern of vowels and consonants or resonance of speech due to a geographical location in the same language.

A speech language pathologist is a professional trained to work with people that have communication disorders. Accent reduction is not considered a communication disorder; however, it is a speech difference that can draw attention to the speaker. Some people prefer to have the individual or small group interaction that a speech language pathologist can provide. A speech pathologist also has the knowledge of specific sound production that teachers of English as a second language don't have. There are universities that provide public speaking classes as well as community groups that will offer help to those people who speak English as a second language. The internet also provides a wealth of information and accent reduction programs for the computer.

Many of us have had the experience of calling for technological help, listening to a professor, doctor, or just a neighbor and not having a clue what that person was trying to say because their accents were so thick. That is frustrating for the speaker as well as the listener. There are times when accent reduction is necessary to progress in certain professions and jobs. While a regionalism may

not have the same impact on intelligibility it can also impart a speaking voice that those of us in high verbal careers may find obtrusive. It is not uncommon for those in the acting and teaching fields to want to rid themselves of regionalisms when they find themselves relocating.

I have to confess that I enjoy listening to people that have accents. Unless the accent or regionalism is interfering with intelligibility, self esteem, or social or business advancement; it may not be something necessary to change.