

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEST

VARIETIES OF ENGLISH AND THE MEDIA

Television has greatly extended the process of making everyone familiar with different varieties of English and a wider range of experience. No longer are children exposed only to the speech of their region and class. Almost all children in Britain are as familiar with the speech of the *Neighbours* of Ramsey Street, Australia, or of the characters of *Sesame Street* as they are with that of their parents. And older children are as likely to reflect the speech patterns of a favourite pop star as those of their relatives or friends. Children are also exposed to televised versions of films made for their parents' or even grandparents' generation and so are often able to share in the linguistic experiences of their elders [...].

As a result of all that they see and hear on television, people have generally become much more conscious of language, of the power it has and of the status associated with certain varieties. [...] It has been claimed by Marckwardt and Quirk (1964) that British cinema-goers at first found the accent and idiom of American films difficult to understand [...]. Undoubtedly, American accents did predominate, and a number of British actors (Cary Grant and Green Garson, for example) even developed what is sometimes called a 'mid-Atlantic' pronunciation, thus concealing their origins. And the range of American pronunciations represented was certainly wide, whereas British representation was mainly confined to RP. As a result, it is probably true to say that British film-goers became familiar with a greater variety of American pronunciation than was true in the opposite direction. Even today there are many British accents which Americans find difficult to understand, but there are few American ones which give any trouble to the British.

Accent variety was not merely incidental in American films, however; it could be functional, too. It was and, to a lesser extent, still is one of the primary devices used to create stereotypes. A southern Irish accent, for example, is almost invariably associated with a large, well-meaning, loyal dunderhead who enjoys a drink and a fight; a German accent often signals humourless intelligence; a French accent is romantic; a Mexican one either funny or sinister, depending on whether the character carries a guitar or a rifle. American Blacks were for many years portrayed as stupid and feckless, a stereotype that was signalled by a "Yessum-Mister-Tom-a's-a-comin'" pronunciation which moulded and confirmed popular prejudices a great deal more effectively than any Ku Klux Klan propaganda. 'Normal' people, of course, spoke 'American'.

Grammar can also be useful for stereotyping. In general, the grammar used in films is that of the standard language. Like eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novelists, film directors are likely to idealise the linguistic performance of their main characters. Non-standard forms like "She ain't in" or "He never said nothin' to me" are permitted to servants and minor characters, but the main

performers generally speak Standard English, regardless of their social or regional origins. Even Tarzan, to whom Hollywood and not Edgar Rice Burroghs gave the immortal line "Me Tarzan, you Jane", spoke Standard English most of the time. In recognition of the strangeness of his upbringing and background, however, he was denied the use of the reduced forms such as 'I'm', 'you're', 'isn't' and 'didn't'. Aliens from space or from lost continents are likely to suffer a similar grammatical deprivation.

The grammar of film language, therefore, rarely presented any problems to English-speaking film-goers, although they may have experienced some initial difficulties with vocabulary. Thus, in films, they encountered, probably for the first time, 'corrals', 'round-ups', 'showdowns', 'boot-leggers', 'speakeasies', 'the Mafia', 'the electric chair', 'private eyes', 'cops', 'stir' and 'screws', for example. Many of these items remained passive, heard only in the cinema and rarely used productively except by children acting out their fantasies. American films have, however, either introduced or popularised a large number of expressions which have acquired wider usage [...].

As for the future, although all the media will no doubt play some part, television and radio will probably prove to be the most powerful influences as far as English is concerned. Such influence may not always be for the good. There are many, for example, who believe that reliance on television, and to a lesser extent radio, will have a detrimental effect on the teaching of literacy. It could also be argued that both broadcasting media, because of their continual searching after novelty in language, especially obvious in pop music broadcasts aimed at the young, and in advertising, distort and trivialise the language. But against such negative effects can be set many positive ones. Television and radio do widen horizons for all of us and bring experiences and information to the masses which were, until recently, reserved for the few.

Nor does it seem likely that the language's role as an international lingua franca will be adversely affected by the influence of the media. Today, English is the official or most widely used language in more countries than any other world language, being spoken in some form by close to one thousand million people. It is improbable that this situation will be radically changed in the immediate future because there are, and will continue to be, pressures at work to preserve the intelligibility of international Englishes.

From: c. 5 in W.R. O'Donnell and L. Todd, *Variety in Contemporary English*, London, Routledge, 1991 (2nd ed.), pp. 97-100.

Part A: Approaching the text

Exercise 1: *In this text there are 7 physical paragraphs. Match each sub-heading with the physical paragraph(s) which is / are conceptually related to it. **DO NOT INSERT THE SAME PARAGRAPH INTO MORE THAN ONE SUB-HEADING***

1. The influence of television on children's language competence (par. _____)
2. Language varieties as indicators of status and power: British vs. American films (par. _____)
3. Linguistic devices used in films to create stereotypes (par. _____)
4. The influence of film language on language use (par. _____)

Exercise 2: *Match each connective below with the function it performs in the text by filling the corresponding blank with either*

- a** (for Additive)
b (for Concessive)
c (for Causal)
or **d** (for Contrastive).

(PAY ATTENTION TO THE REFERENCE LINE IN BRACKETS AND WRITE ONLY ONE LETTER IN EACH BLANK)

1. As a result (l. 9) _____
2. whereas (l. 15) _____
3. but (l. 19) _____
4. for example (l. 22) _____
5. therefore (l. 39) _____
6. however (l. 44) _____

Part B: Intensive reading

Exercise 3: *Read the text carefully and choose the appropriate answer(s):*

1. What is the overall function of this text?
 - to discuss the influence of the media on language use
 - to describe the influence of the media on the use of English
 - to explore the relationships between the media, language and lifestyles
2. This text is an extract from a textbook called *Variety in Contemporary English*. Can you guess which of the following topics is NOT dealt with in the book?
 - Class dialects
 - Translation
 - English in advertising

3. Who is this text for?

- Film-makers
- English language teachers and specialists
- English language students

Exercise 4: *Making reference to the text, decide whether the following statements are TRUE (T), or FALSE (F), or INCOMPLETE (I) paraphrases of the information conveyed (N.B.: the various statements appear in the order in which the information is presented in the text):*

1. By watching films children often have a chance to learn ancient uses of their language (___)
2. British film-goers learned less about American English than American film-goers did with British English (___)
3. Accents are often exploited to carry specific connotations (___)
4. Television and radio have a negative influence on the young (___)
5. The media will probably change the role of English as an international lingua franca (___)

Exercise 5: *The following is a list of synonyms for words/expressions which appear in the text in the physical paragraph indicated in brackets and in the order given on the list. Find the corresponding words/expressions and write them in, together with their respective line number:*

1. aware (par. 2) _____ (line ___)
2. maintained / argued (*past participle*) (par. 2) _____ (line ___)
3. hiding / keeping from being known (*gerund*) (par.2) _____ (line ___)
4. limited (par. 2) _____ (line ___)
5. additional / supplementary (par. 3) _____ (line ___)
6. main / most important (par. 3) _____ (line ___)
7. indicates (*simple present*) (par. 3) _____ (line ___)
8. depicted (*past participle*) (par. 3) _____ (line ___)
9. influenced (*simple past*) (par. 3) _____ (line ___)
10. behaviour (par. 4) _____ (line ___)
11. independently of (par. 4) _____ (line ___)
12. undergone (*past participle*) (par. 5) _____ (line ___)
13. detectives (par. 5) _____ (line ___)
14. negative / bad (par. 6) _____ (line ___)
15. ability to read and write (par. 6) _____ (line ___)
16. amplify / broaden up (par. 6) _____ (line ___)
17. negatively (par. 7) _____ (line ___)
18. almost / nearly (par. 7) _____ (line ___)

Part C: Guided writing

Exercise 6: *Re-read the lines indicated in brackets and then complete the following paraphrases by choosing ONE word/expression for each missing item:*

- (ll. 20-21) Ever since films were distributed worldwide, accent variety (is / has been) one of the primary devices used to create stereotypes.

- (ll. 33-35) (Although / Whereas) it is commonly believed that the phrase “Me Tarzan, you Jane” was coined by Edgar Rice Burroughs, it was Hollywood that attributed it to Tarzan.
- (ll.46-48) In the future television and radio (ought to / might) prove to be the media (which / who) will have the (greater / greatest) influence on the use of English.

Exercise 7: *What follows is an extract from the follow-up of the text “Varieties of English and the media”. Complete the extract by choosing one option for each missing item from the list below:*

(1) that the strong prestige of the standard language allied to (2) continued use in education and in the media, (3) television, will ensure that standard English will remain an international lingua franca and that extreme divergences will not (4). United States English will not in the (5) future become a different language from British English although international English will increasingly be modelled on the former since, apart from (6) military and economic strength, the United States has more than four times (7) many native speakers as Britain. In summing up, we should like (8) a number of points. First, the media are interactive. Not only (9) each other, but they (10) a summary, preview or commentary on each other. Secondly, the media have different strengths. Radio and television offer instantaneous coverage of an event, but the press alone (11) offer extensive explanation and amplification of such occurrences. Newspapers, by (12) comprehensive coverage of complex issues, can (13) complement the more immediate reports of radio and television. Films are probably (14) now than they were before television became standard equipment in (15) households. Yet the size of its screen and the fact that film-goers must make a conscious decision to go to the cinema ensure that their role of providing spectacle and entertainment is (16) of considerable importance.

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|------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| (1) | a. it seems to us | b. it seems us | c. we seem |
| (2) | a. --- | b. her | c. its |
| (3) | a. specially | b. especially | c. namely |
| (4) | a. tolerate | b. tolerated | c. be tolerated |
| (5) | a. foreseeing | b. foreseeable | c. foreseen |
| (6) | a. --- | b. their | c. its |
| (7) | a. so | b. too | c. as |
| (8) | a. to stress | b. stress | c. stressing |
| (9) | a. they influence | b. do they influence | c. influence |
| (10) | a. often offer | b. offer often | c. have often offered |
| (11) | a. must | b. can | c. should |
| (12) | a. provide | b. providing | c. provided |
| (13) | a. conversely | b. nevertheless | c. thus |
| (15) | a. influentialler | b. more influential | c. most influential |
| (16) | a. the most of | b. most of | c. most |
| (17) | a. again | b. still | c. yet |

Exercise 8: *Write ONE paragraph (approx. 100 words) arguing for or against the statement that the media can have a strong influence on the public's views as well as on language use.*