

Ten tips to make your students reflect on varieties of English

By Kristine Hasund (Universitet i Agder)

1. «Play with what you already know»

Ask your students: «Does anyone know how to speak Australian English?» Let them show off. TV-series, football, YouTube are excellent sources to varieties of English and your students are likely to know just as much about this as you do. Moreover, imitation is fun.

- Task: Find a quote or a sentence that you think represents an Australian or Indian version of English (Birdie nam, nam...)
- Ask them to imitate (Rio Ferdinand, Uncle Roger, Life of Bryan)
- «Are you able to describe the accent?» This is a good opportunity to teach terminology.

2. «Compare English to Norwegian»

- Watch Rune Nilson travel around Norway.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnrzXvJyE4>

3. “Listen to one woman speaking 17 different UK accents”

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyyT2jmVPAk>
- Task: Which ones did you recognize?
- Have you heard of “Received Pronunciation”?
 - Non-localised, still based on South-East accent
 - High-prestige variety linked to the Public-School system and the BBC.
 - Spoken by approximately 2% of population
 - Traditionally important in global English teaching
- Have you heard about “Cockney”?
 - Why teach this? Questions of language policy, language and social class
 - *My Fair Lady* (1956 musical based on *Pygmalion* by G.B. Shaw 1913): [Plot summary](#)
 - Here is the pronunciation scene:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKxd30IQ1f0>

4. «Close your eyes and listen 1»

- Introduction: Ask your students to close their eyes and listen to this clip from a TED talk
https://www.ted.com/talks/ashweetha_shetty_how_education_helped_me_rewrite_my_life Listen from 9:51 until 9:15 minutes left
- Task:
 - Think: What did she talk about?
 - Did you understand everything?
 - Listen once more, eyes open
 - Read the TED talk title and short description
 - Then, listen while using English subtitles
- Language and attitudes:
 - Listen again to the same TED talk clip
 - Eyes open and English subtitles
 - Now from 5:20 until 4:55 minutes left

- Discuss: What are your own attitudes to Indian English?

5. "Love Actually and Colin's vowels"

- Ask your students: Can you remember how Colin makes use of his British accent to attract the girls when he goes to the US?
- BE /ɒ/ - AE /ɑ:/ as a rule, e.g. in hot, proper, bottle = no contrast in AE between the vowels in hot and calm, where RP has /ɒ/ in hot and /ɑ:/ in calm.
- Love Actually: Colin goes to America (at 01:55): the words bottle, straw and table.

6. "Close your eyes and listen 2"

- Listen first with your eyes closed:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5HDerf5Ahk>
- What is this song about? Which variety of English? Which features do you notice?
- Listen again with your eyes open
- Scottish children's song with lyrics
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzCdQbxgkAQ>

7. "Australian English"

In the two following examples – what language features do you notice?

- Accent tag: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8v6bw2Uz-8E>
- Rolf Harris sings "Waltzing Mathilda":
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEVKUE_ma00

8. «First person singular»

Jeg in Norwegian vs *I* in English-speaking countries

- The Norwegian first-person pronoun *jeg* is pronounced in many ways. Look at the map of Norway and point to where the different forms of first-person *jeg* are pronounced.
- Then do the same for English, using the world map. How different is first-person *I* pronounced around the world?

9. "African American English and Bruno Mars"

- Study Bruno Mars' hit "[Uptown Funk](#)" by Mark Ronson (2014) (or choose another Bruno Mars hit)
 - What do you know about this song?
 - Study content and language – meaning and form. Sources: yourselves and Google! For instance:
 - slang: urbandictionary.com
 - Music Fans Stack Exchange: [The meaning of "Uptown Funk"](#)

10. "Make a class play list!"

- Ask all students to write down their favourite song (all-time favourite or at the moment).
- Compile the complete list and study it. How many songs are in English?
- Consider these questions:
 - Which variety of English do you listen to?
 - As far as you know: What varieties of English do Norwegian teenagers listen to?

Further tips:

- Focus on phonetics
- Focus on vocabulary (aint/aksd – African American Vernacular English)
- Make sure you teach varieties of English, both dialects and accents. I teach:
 - Irish
 - Scotts
 - Australian
 - UK North/South
 - South African
 - US Southern/NY/AAVE