

# Example of essay on language

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



No man is an island. Although it may sound cliché in the modern society that people live in today, this quote bears a big importance in the formation of groups and society. Every individual is unique. Some come from different walks of life, while others are defined by their beliefs and values. There is also the difference brought about by the geographical location where everyone is born, as well as the various ways that individual is raised by their own families. Despite the differences, people became tied together and formed groups because of language. People of the past communicated through uttered words and gestures and formed settlements that brought them together in what is now known as society. Behind all the differences, people's ability to communicate made it possible for them to determine certain similarities that bound them together and set a common goal to reach. According to Sterling, language is man's basic tool for organizing experiences and realities (p. 5). Language proved to be an effective medium in achieving unity. However, as society evolved and conflict arose, has also become a barrier in achieving unity. Although language is a tool for uniting people in determining their identity and creating a society, the societies of today misuse language through the formation of perceptions and judgments against identities that affect relationships, dividing people and in turn, destroying society. To be exact, accent, which is inherent in every individual's spoken language, has become a reason for others to form prejudice against an individual's nationality, education, social status, and identity.

A person's accent based on his/her country of origin is used as factor in judging one's character. For instance, a student who is not a native American

will be judged based on the characteristics that have been previously attached to the people who came from the student's country of origin. It is common to see non-American students sitting alone on their own in the first few months of class while the others hang out in groups. During class or group discussion, non-American students would rarely speak because native English speakers would normally dominate the discussion. Accent prestige theory suggests that any individual who speaks with an accent different from the accent of the dominant group in the society is rated less than those who speak the standard accent (qtd. in Anderson et. al p. 5). The theory shows how language divides people in the society as a result of accent, and this situation can be commonly observed these days. No matter how good the person speaks the language of the dominant group, the accent is still a big factor in the formation of perception about the person. Asian Americans who are usually perceived as overachievers will still be less likely invited to socialization activities because even if they are fluent in English, they are perceived to be lacking appropriate social and communication skills (Zhang). Listeners, even those who don't speak with the standard accent, give different reactions to any accent other than the standard accent, and this is what's creating a divide among students and the society at large. In the case of James Kahakua which was studied in 1991, his accent was also the reason why he was denied promotion in the radio station where he was working (Sterling p. 1). Kahakua was a meteorologist and had been working in the said station for some years. However, when he was supposed to be promoted to a position that would require him to read prepared reports on radio broadcasts, he was denied. The reason cited had nothing to do with his

qualifications, but had to do with the Hawai'ian accent that he had. Kahakua was from Hawaii which is an American state. He speaks both English and Hawai'ian Creole English which gives him a certain accent that is different from that of standard English speakers. Management of the said radio station felt that putting Kahakua in a broadcast position would be similar to promoting wrong English because of the accent (Sterling p. 13). This situation points out to the exclusion that people who speak with non-standard accent experience, despite sharing the same citizenship and having the ability to speak the same language that the majority speaks.

### **Accent is also a factor that some standard speakers use to judge a person's education.**

In one instance, a Ukrainian student studying in America's mother went to the grocery. As she approached one of the staff to ask in English but with a tinge of Ukrainian accent where to find a certain product, the staff answered by speaking slowly and in a loud voice. The staff's action seems to be implying that even though the Ukrainian mother can speak English, she wouldn't be able to understand a native English speaker. This is not always the case with people who are not Americans, but the bias has been established. Accent-based bias is universal but in America, a speaker with a Southern twang is perceived to be dimwitted but is also likely to be nicer than those who speak with the Yankee accent (Fields). Several anecdotal evidence prove this belief, and one of which was observed in an airport. In the said conversation, two women were both flying to Memphis. One of the women introduced herself as someone from Baltimore and struck a conversation with the woman sitting next to her as they were waiting for

their flight. As normal conversations would start, the woman from Baltimore asked how the other woman was. In response, the other woman said “ Fine, how about you?” with a heavy Southern accent. The woman from Baltimore had a sneer look on her face and started talking slowly with a phony southern accent. This example shows how people with Northern accent believe that those with Southern accent are less intelligent than them. The said connotation started from the Northerners’ belief that their English is more standard than that of the Southerners despite the language being the same. This situation reinforces the idea that accent-based bias is not exclusive to a certain country. Like the situation of the Ukrainian mother in the grocery, the two women who are both Americans but speak with different accents are also prone to forming bias based on accent. The woman who spoke with the standard accent thought of the woman with the Southern accent as less intelligent, a bias that has been formed years back. Americans from the North are said to be less friendly and tend to think lowly of Americans from the South because of their accent.

This sad reality coincides with the experience of Kahakua in his workplace. American companies tend to show bias towards Northern accent, which enforces the idea that Northern accent is truly the standard accent. This presents several negative impacts on Americans, because despite sharing the same nationality and language, they are judged against by their own people within their own country.

Speakers with non-standard accents are also judged low when it comes to professional ability. A friend who works as a nurse in a hospital shared that one time while on duty, an old American woman requested for an American

nurse to assist her when the friend offered to do so. The nurse, despite being Ukrainian, has been living in America for almost ten years and speaks English well. His accent was not as strong but is still different from the standard accent that Americans speak. This bias shows no proof as to why Americans would think such but can be attributed to what accent prestige theory posits. People with standard accent are easily accepted and viewed positively in the society. Two studies by Fuertes showed that people from the United States perceive Hispanic accented counselors less competent than non-Hispanic counselors without an accent (qtd. in Anderson et. al p. 6). As a result, Americans show less willingness to commit to long-term therapy with a Hispanic-accented counselor. Accent prestige theory states that there are two categories used in forming judgments. One is the category of status dimension based on characteristics in relation to intelligence, education, social class, and success (Anderson et. al p. 5). The other is the category of solidarity dimension which is used to rate the speaker in areas of friendliness, trustworthiness, and kindness (Anderson et. al p. 5). As shown in the situations previously cited, speakers with standard accent are rated high in both dimensions by both speakers with standard and non-standard accent. Speakers with non-standard accent are also more likely to give high ratings to speakers with standard accent in status dimension, but higher rating in solidarity dimension to speakers with non-standard accent like them (Fuertes, Potere, and Ramirex, qtd. in Anderson et. al, p. 5). In Fuertes' studies, Hispanic counselors would naturally be rated low by Americans in both status and solidarity dimension as they have different accents. It would only follow that if Americans are presented with American counselors, they

would give higher rating in both dimensions as long as they share the same accent. Results of both studies pose a serious issue in the society with regards to the ideas of exclusion and prejudice. Prejudice and exclusion should not exist in the society, but several factors influence its presence. To attempt to change this reality will prove to be a great challenge.

Language is meant to unite people because it is a tool that people use to communicate. However, even when speaking in the same language, conflicts can still happen. This is the nature of humans as a result of everyone's uniqueness. Within the family, siblings fight every now and then because of several issues, but at the end of the day, they make up and resolve their conflicts. This is not the same with society. Apart from race, culture, and other factors that differentiate one person to another, accent is also a factor that divides people in the society. People from Asia, England, Africa, or even from the southern part of America, despite being fluent in English, will be rated low by people who speak English with standard accent. This is the same in any part of the world as accent-based bias is universal (Fields). This is the sad reality of language, as when it should be a tool to establish relationship and unite the people, it is also used as a weapon to divide and destroy the society.

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