

ACCENT REDUCTION -

African Languages - Accent Breakdown

These notes will give some broad indications for most speakers of West and Central African languages, however there are so many variations, you will need to refer to your coach for more precise information.



West & Central African Language Features

Default Posture

All these accents hold a much wider and more open mouth position – more smiley if you like. This changes all the vowel sounds and makes lip rounding less common, making it harder to differentiate all 20 vowel sounds of RP English.

The tongue also tends to be higher in the mouth and the jaw will open to find Vertical space at the front of the mouth, but not in the middle, which means comparisons of Front, Middle and Back vowels can be blurred. Our Voice training Articulation Exercises will help the speech muscles accommodate to the different movement pattern of English.

A great many speakers, especially from Nigeria, will use a very strong throat resonance – a big, low, rich sound. It helps to balance this with head resonance (higher, thinner tones) both to make the 'tone' of the voice more RP, but also to make the vowels more distinct. Full throat resonance can sound very loud to European ears.

Stress & Intonation Patterns

Many of these accents have very strong stress and intonation patterns, carried over from the original mother-tongue (even if the speaker has never spoken it) which are completely different to those of RP English.

As RP English uses intonation and rhythm to communicate meanings, this can cause considerable confusion, when a different but still very strong rhythmic pattern is imposed on top of the phrases in unexpected places.

Intonation and Stress are the main causes of the difficulty some African speakers have in making themselves understood in Britain and amongst non-native speakers of English. We cover this lightly in Stages 1 and 2, but the in-depth study of Stress and Intonation in Stage 3 may be of particular use.

Specific Consonant Differences

The main points of work are as follows. They are covered in Stages 1 and 2:

1. to adopt **TH** accurately;
2. to adopt **H** if necessary and avoid saying it in front of vowels when it shouldn't be pronounced;
3. to adopt **NG** (ie in singing), especially in verbs ending in -ing;
4. to change **R** and **L** if required;
5. to strengthen the **W**;
6. to lightly alter the placement of **T** and **D**, making it more precise and changing the tongue movement if necessary
7. some speakers also need work on clusters (groups of consonants) like at the end of 'ask' to ensure they come out in the right order;
8. some speakers will also have to adapt where they say the **R** sound.

Specific Vowel Differences

These are the general points, again mostly covered in Stages 1 and 2 (although Stage 3 will revisit the all important Short Neutral (Schwa) vowel):

1. in general all of these accents need to address the differences between the long and short vowel pairs - in particular the Horizontal pair **sit** and **seat**;
2. this also creates confusion between pairs such as **first** and **fussed**;
3. the short Neutral vowel, 'the schwa' tends to be over-pronounced, following the spelling;
4. other vowels are effected strongly by the different Default Position of the muscles, with a lack of Verticality in the sounds. This can cause major confusions between front, middle and back vowels such as **cat**, **cut**, **cot** and **caught**;
5. There is also not strong enough lip rounding for words like **you** and **your**, **pot** and **put**;
6. the diphthongs **day** and **go** can also be replaced by monophthongs (unchanging vowels such as in **debt** and **got**).

These are just some of the specific issues we will focus on in your lessons and homework. See the syllabuses for all three stages below for more information, and bear in mind that our teachers always adapt the work to provide the most useful experience for the exact make-up of your group.

ACCENT REDUCTION - Stage 1 - Course Contents English Pronunciation & Elocution

Week 1

How to release the jaw and face muscles
Default setting of RP English
Neutral vowels

Before filming

Week 2

How to release the back of the tongue
Strong and weak stress/strong and soft vowels
Vertical vowels

Week 3

How to strengthen and use the tongue tip
The most common consonants, TH, S, Z, T, D, N, L
Horizontal-Vertical vowels

Week 4

How to strengthen and use the lips
Lip consonants - W, V, F, M, B, P
Sagittal and Vertical-Sagittal vowels

Week 5

Middle of tongue mobility and strength
The R, L and /j/ sounds
Horizontal vowels
Short and long vowels

Week 6

Complete articulation workout
Your consonant targets
The whole RP basic vowel system

After filming

Please note:
your teacher will personalise the contents of your course to your group's precise needs, but this is a rough outline of what you will study.

ACCENT REDUCTION - Stage 2 - Course Contents

Total Speech Accuracy

Week 1

How to say the 'o's
Plosive consonants
Word endings - voiced/whispered

Before filming

Week 2

How to say the 'a's
Fricative consonants
Reduced vowels & contractions

Week 3

How to say the 'u's
Nasal Consonants
Linking - consonant to consonant

Week 4

How to say the 'e's
Semi-vowel consonants
Linking - vowel to vowel

Week 5

How to say the 'i's
Affricate consonants
Clusters and syllabic consonants

Week 6

How to say the 'gh's
Accent self-analysis
Your vowel and consonant targets

After filming

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ACCENT REDUCTION - Stage 3 - Course Contents Stress and Intonation

Week 1

Basics of Stress - Strong/Weak system
Syllable stress - Level 1
Sentence stress - Level 2

Before filming

Week 2

Weak forms and the Schwa
Linking
Stress in word groups - introduction

Week 3

Stress in word groups - noun phrases, descriptions
Stress in word groups - numbers, names, verb phrases

Week 4

Tonic syllable - Level 3
Phrasing
Intonation basic patterns - Level 4

Week 5

Question intonation
Tag questions

Week 6

Stress and intonation in rhetorical patterns
Public speaking practice

After filming

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