**Ulrike Bavendiek** Hello, everyone. And thank you very much for listening to this introduction to our series: *Accent racism, linguistics stereotyping and ethnic accent bullying in higher education* - *What is it? And how can we avoid it?* My name is Ulrike Bavendiek and I am a Senior Lecturer in German studies, and the Director of the Centre for Teaching Excellence in Language Learning here at the University of Liverpool. Today I'm talking to my colleague Wil Hardman, who works in English and who is an English for Academic Purposes tutor and works in in the English Language Centre at the University of Liverpool. This series is funded by the University of Liverpool *Equality and Diversity Kickstarter Fund* and aims to raise awareness of linguistic diversity and accent biases in higher education.

Okay, I hand over to you, Wil.

**Wil Hardman** Okay, thanks, Ulrike. And she said it just as an introduction to the project, I'm going to ask Ulrike a few questions about some of the basic concepts related. Okay, so the first question is, what is an accent?

**Ulrike Bavendiek** Well, an accent is the way someone sounds when they speak. So everybody has an accent, at least in the opinion of other people. Basically, we notice accent as difference, when something is said in a way that is different from the way we would say it. Of course, in today's world we're all very interconnected, and we know people from different walks of life, so we are usually aware of our own accent as well. When we say someone has “no accent”, and I use quotation marks here, then usually what we mean is that that person speaks “standard”. The so-called standard simply being a very prestigious accent.

Think about received pronunciation, which is even called “Queens English” in English, and you can see how prestige and the perception of this variety as being the standard are linked. And since we don't expect a 15-year-old boy from Liverpool, for example, to dress like the Queen, we should wonder why they should speak like the Queen. They can, if they want to of course, it's not for us to judge, but it is up to them. It is their identity and their belonging that they express. A person may feel that they belong to a particular region or to a particular social group, and then they emphasize that in the way, in how they pronounce words, how they modulate their voice, even the words and grammatical structures they use.

So that is then their accent. And of course how someone speaks also depends on what they've heard when they grew up, when they acquired their first language as a child. So when they predominantly hear a particular dialect, then that is what they will acquire as their accent.

**Wil Hardman** Okay, and so are some accents harder to understand than others?

**Ulrike Bavendiek** Well, again, I would say that depends on the difference to how we speak, so we will probably perceive something as more difficult to understand when it is very different from how we speak ourselves. And I think we have to distinguish as well between an accent and a real genuine pronunciation mistake. But that is something that we deal with in the language classroom, and that's not something we're discussing here. So we're talking about accents that can be understood.

**Wil Hardman** Okay, so you mentioned the language classroom there because we're going to talk a little bit about the accents of second language learners, who often get referred to as non-native speakers, but we've decided we're not going to use that terminology since we think it could be a little bit problematic. So Ulrike could you tell us a bit about why that term “non-native speaker” can be problematic.

**Ulrike Bavendiek** Again, in today's world it's a bit more complex, isn’t it. So when I think of a native speaker, I always wonder about my own children, my own kids, who have two German parents, but were born and grew up in Britain, in the UK. And you wonder, are they native speakers of one language or of two languages? I would say of two languages. They are bilingual. But what if we had moved to Spain when they were, I don't know, at the age of 3 or 4? Would they still be native speakers in both languages, or only in one language, and if so, which? Would they be native speakers in Spanish? So this is a really difficult concept, the same, and you can see that it is almost a logical consequence of that, but the term “foreign” is equally difficult.

**Wil Hardman** Yeah, no I mean another example of how they can be problematic is, for example, when speakers who come from, you know, or if they're not from white dominating Western countries like the UK, US, Canada or Australia, but they still speak English as their first language, like yeah, communicating in India or Nigeria, sometimes they can still be perceived as being non-native, even though English is their first language. And that also shows how, like, nativeness also has this, can potentially have racist elements as well to it so there's another reason why we decided not to use it.

And so, the next question is, why are second language learners then perceived to have foreign accents?

**Ulrike Bavendiek** Well, the reason has to do with the way we acquire language. One of the first things that a child acquires, and you see I'm not using the term “learned” here, is the sound system. And that is what, basically what sounds are important or relevant in their language and what sounds aren’t. By “sound” here I mean not only the pronunciation of individual sounds like, *o* or *o* or however you say it in a language, or the different ways of pronouncing *r* or the fact that T H, the *th* sound doesn't even exist in German, for example, so the phonetics, but I also mean the stress, the rhythm, the intonation, loudness and so on, so the prosodics. So both of that is sound, and the sounds, and how we produce and modulate them are very important in a language, and they are regulated by a system, the phonological system of a language. No language uses all the sounds that humans are able to produce or perceive. So the first thing a baby learns or figures out are the sound patterns that are relevant and important in their language. And that's why, for example, parents or any adult really, it’s an instinct, who sees a baby or a very small child, will start producing certain sounds, communicate with them in a certain way, and that's called “parenthese” or “baby talk”, or “caretaker talk”. So the baby tunes in to the sound patterns of that language. It's been shown that these sounds, or the sounds that an English man for example makes, or an English dad, are very different from the sounds that a French parent would make, or the sounds that a German parent would make or a Chinese parent. So the sounds already differ, and that is what the child learns. As I said, that is an instinct and of course that's one reason why we communicate [with babies], other than bonding and all the other reasons.

**Wil Hardman** So is that why certain learners find it difficult to perceive certain sounds?

**Ulrike Bavendiek** Yes, it is. So imagine that very small baby growing up in Japan, or hearing Japanese, that baby will not learn to distinguish between *r* and *l*. Why not? Because in Japanese *r* and *l* never make a difference to a word whether you pronounce it more on the *r* side or more on the *l* side, it doesn't really matter. But in English you have pairs of words, we call them “minimal pairs” like *red* and *lead*/ (*led*) or *row* and *low*, and you see that the meaning really changes depending on whether you use *r* or *l* at the beginning. That means that the child will acquire that. It will learn to listen out for these sounds and to perceive them because they are so relevant in the language.

Another example, something I always struggle with as a German speaker is the sentence *He had a hard hat on his head*. It’s very hard for me to pronounce, because there are certain things that German doesn't do. For example, the *hard*, we have a hard *t* at the end, but not a *d,* so *had,* he *had a* *hat. Hat* is more natural for me *hard* [or had], that is very hard to say. Or *he had on his head,* again, is a pair that for me is very hard to distinguish, and to produce and to perceive. So as a result of this, of this very early acquisition of the sound pattern of a language, people who start learning a language later in life very often have an accent.

**Wil Hardman** So even very proficient speakers still have an accent then?

**Ulrike Bavendiek** Yes, yeah. And I think that it is very important to distinguish between an accent, and what we call language proficiency, which is the overall mastery of a language. Proficiency is measured in the range of vocabulary that somebody can correctly and confidently use, or in the range of grammatical patterns that we can use, whether we can speak, or express certain functions of grammar, so we can speak about the past, the future, hypothetical things, things like that. So that is how we measure proficiency. But somebody who is highly proficient in the language or even bilingual may still have an accent. So that's very important to remember.

**Wil Hardman** Okay, and so the final question then, is, what can be the consequences of sounding foreign?

**Ulrike Bavendiek** Well, one consequence, and we're talking about a lot of these consequences here in this range of talks and podcasts and so on, but one consequence that I would like to mention here, because I don't think we're going to pick it up again, is [the fact] that most people don't, well don't remember what an accent entails. So most people understand foreign accent as being limited to the production of sounds like when I say, or when I struggle saying *he had a hard hat on his head*, then people will immediately know, oh, yeah, she's a second language speaker, or additional language speaker, and she struggles with that. But of course, part of an accent is also the intonation, the pitch, the rhythm, length, stress, volume, all of that. So part of that I bring from my own language, which is much more difficult for people to understand, because we usually connect, or we usually associate implicit meanings with that, with how we sound or modulate our voices. So, for example, we perceive someone as being nice, warm, or rude and harsh, based on this. But this information, these information patterns can come from the foreign language as well, and, in my opinion, the fact that we transfer at least some of these intonation patterns from our own language is the basis of many, many stereotypes. If we think somebody, or a group of speakers is insincere or overly friendly or harsh or impolite or moany, or demanding and so on I think that has to do with the fact that we think, yes, sound yes, but not the prosodic, not the intonation, we don't perceive that as part of an accent.

**Wil Hardman** Okay, that brings us to the end of my questions, anyway. So do you want to advertise the rest of the podcast?

So the other consequences, of course, we are going to talk about in the remaining parts of this series which is all about raising awareness of some other consequences of accents. So we will explore a range of consequences, including social meanings and stereotypes to do with accents, which are often discriminatory, or can even serve as a proxy for racism or classism. There can be consequences in people not believing even what accented speakers say, based on the speech processing speed, or speed of processing an accent, that's Shiri Lev-Ari who's going to talk about it. So yes, we have a range of speakers.

Please listen to our podcasts, watch the videos, do the quizzes, to learn about other potential consequences of sounding foreign or different. Thank you very much.