

What is linguistic discrimination, and what is the SLP's role in effectively ameliorating this with accent modification clients?

- Linguistic discrimination is a widespread and devastating phenomenon throughout the world. Persons may experience prejudice or discrimination when their speech sounds different from a perceived norm. Accent modification providers are on the front lines in the fight against this discrimination.
- The goal of accent modification is effective communication, which is a shared responsibility between speakers and listeners. Although accent modification is the current preferred term for SLPs, it is a misnomer since services do not focus on the accent itself. Instead, they focus on intelligibility, comprehensibility, naturalness, and other pillars of communication. Research has shown that “accentedness” (i.e., simply sounding different than a perceived norm) can be isolated from these other factors and should be embraced as a part of the beauty of linguistic diversity.
- Accent modification takes place around the globe. Services conducted in English are provided by native and non-native speakers of countless dialects of English by culturally and linguistically diverse providers. Most commonly, non-native clients seek services in English. Some clients speak a form of English that may not be understood well in different areas of the globe, such as a speaker of Nigerian English working in the U.S. A third client is the American seeking services to support pronunciation after relocating to a different area of the U.S.
- Adults acquire other languages differently than their mother tongue, and direct instruction and guidance make the process more narrowly targeted and efficient. Often accent modification in English is provided by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), who usually call it pronunciation instruction.
- Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) are highly trained communication experts, and accent modification is within their scope of practice.
- Services are elective. Clients should always make the choice in whether to seek services and how they are provided. An analogy would be transgender voice training, where services are provided to non-disabled clients who voluntarily seek non-medical speech services.
- While some clients seek services because they face personal or professional obstacles, others wish to improve their communication skills as self-development to reach their highest potential.
- Studies have demonstrated the efficacy of accent modification in increasing intelligibility, comprehensibility, confidence, and other factors essential for successful communication.
- With accent modification services, clients report improvement in their listening comprehension, promoting inclusion in their work, school, and community. When learning to produce spoken features of English for their community, they also learn to understand English speakers with more clarity and efficiency, providing them with the opportunity for more involvement and impact at work or school.
- Accent modification lessons never seek to eliminate someone's self, personality, or cultural identity. It is only when some features of a client's pronunciation interfere with effective communication, that services are appropriate.
- Accent modification providers have a strong understanding of the social and emotional factors involved when someone's speech sounds different from the community around them. We are sympathetic to their needs, and make it a priority to counsel our clients, advocate on their behalf, teach self-advocacy, and seek greater language diversity awareness in the community at large.
- We welcome any dialog on best practices and the role our services play in ameliorating linguistic discrimination, advocating for linguistic diversity, and providing effective services to our clients since these are at the very heart of our work.

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