

Yelena Rivera Vale: Betty Birner of The Linguistic Society of America explains that your accent is the way you sound when you speak and that here are two different kinds. One is a foreign accent. This occurs when a person speaks one language using some of the rules or sounds of another one. The other kind is simply the way a group of people speak their native language. While we do not notice it when speaking with those who sound the same as us, we are very aware of our accent when we speak a second language.

My name is Yelena Rivera Vale. I'm fully bilingual. I learned English and Spanish at the same time, and I speak both with my Puerto Rican accent. I've created a series of podcasts to share stories about accents. This is one of them.

[music beats]

Interposed Speakers: My name is — My name is Isabel Altamirano — Recha — Halcyon Lawrence — Eugene Mangortey — My name is — Mazlum Kosma — Carol Subiño Sullivan — Sravanthi Meka — Yelena Rivera Vale — Sebastian — Alba Gutierrez — and this is my accent — my accent — my accent story.

Mazlum Kosma: My name is Mazlum Kosma. This is my accent story. I am originally from Turkey. Turkey is Turkia. It's a small country compared to the US, but still there are so many different regions, and each region has a separate, very separate accent. Even within regions there might be accent differences from city to city, county to county. Well, in the native language with accent or without accent, it's still — I could understand; they could understand me, because there was overall the same language. There might be minor differences in the tonations, but you could still get it. But when you speak another language, second language, third language, the language itself is different. On top of that different language, then the accent and especially when you learn or in my case when I had learned English after age mid-20's kind of, that is the hardest part probably.

Not that having an accent bothered me or bothers me at all, at the same time, if when I speak to somebody, if the person says, "Excuse me what did you say, huh? What huh?" Then, that's the question mark start to kind of — what's happening here. When I came to the US, it was so obvious that yes, I thought that I could speak English, but when I speak to people kind of, "Huh, what, huh, say that again." Then, I say okay, there is something here; they are not getting what I say, so it means they don't understand my accent. My full name is Mazlum. Now, let's say, in a social gathering, you say, "Hi, I am Yelena." Then, somebody say, "I am Julie." Then, I say, "I'm Mazlum." And the next person says, "I'm Christian." I said, "Excuse me." And they person says again, "I'm Christian." And I say or I said many times, I said, "I did not ask you religion." And the person said, "But you said, 'You're Muslim.'" I said, "No, no, it is not Muslim. It is Mazlum." Then it's, "Oh." That is a cultural course by itself. At the same time, it's an accent related. It's not my accent though. It is the other person's accent, because even though I say my name is — instead of, if I say, "My name is Mazlum." That may be a lot more clear. When everybody says, "Hi, I am Julie." "I am Thomas." I am not going to say, "My name is." I am. So when I say, "I am Mazlum," ninety percent of the time, people say, "Oh, I'm Christian." I say, "Okay." Again, I don't blame them because in English there is no word as pronounced "Mazlum." The closest sound they can get is "Muslim," which is related to religion. So that's why at one point, I get tired of half an hour explanations, lectures; I say just call me "Maz." M-A-Z, Maz, like Mazda, and of course year after year, this spoken English level changed. Yeah, accent is going to be there. I cannot and I'm not trying to lose the accent period.

Now, after thirty years and actually, I feel the accent sometimes has advantages. Not necessarily in monetary sense but just when I speak to someone, someone may say, "You have an accent. Where are you from?" That's a conversation starter, and I

turn it around. I said, "Oh, yeah. You have an accent too where are you from?" Then of course that gives him the back and forth to turn into conversations. Sometimes, I would question them. I said, "Okay, guess? Since you asked me a question, guess where I am from." Then, they try to say this and this and try to say countries. They try to say languages.

And I say, "See you didn't know that you're getting get into a geographical test." And the other thing, depending on the person, how serious or how comfortable I feel with that person that ask me question, then depending on the situation, I may imitate my accent and I may say, "I am from Chapel Hill, North Carolina," because I lived in Chapel Hill, North Carolina for two years, over two years. That's not a lie.

Then, the person may say, "No, no, no, you are not from there." Way off. So that turns into a deeper conversation of languages, conversation of cultures, conversation of education, etc. I am happy in that I can speak another language with or without an accent. Do all native English speakers speak the same way? No.

People in the South, people in the North, people in California have all different ways of speaking. Not to even mention England. So no, accent is who I am, and it's not only the tone of the person's voice that accent is, yeah, accent is kind of equal to the personality. Basically, you recognize oh yeah that's person x, person y. Yes, that's me.

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