



A-level ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 2 Language diversity and change

Insert

Texts for Section B

Text A

Text A is an article about accents and pronunciation. It was published by *The Independent* in 2024.

Lifestyle

COMMENT

Is having a posh accent a new ick?

Prue Leith from 'Bake Off' says she 'hates' her posh accent. But speaking RP is rarely a hindrance, argues **Katie Rosseinsky**



Thursday 15 February 2024 15:42 GMT • [35](#) Comments



There are few experiences more shudder-inducing than having to listen to a recording of your own voice. Something to do with the way we hear vibrations through our bones when we talk, versus the way we hear air-transmitted sounds, apparently. But for *Great British Bake Off* judge Prue Leith, the exact source of the cringe is more specific: her clipped RP tones. "Oh, I hate my voice," she recently admitted in an interview with *The Times*. "It's too posh."

Is it really possible to sound "too posh" in the UK? Has speaking like you swallowed several back copies of *Debrett's* become a bit of an ick, to borrow that catch-all term, or even (at a very large stretch) a hindrance? Our attitudes to accents are complicated – probably because they reflect our similarly jumbled feelings about class.

In public-facing industries like entertainment, where Leith has found fame, there's a weird double standard around accents, too. Being upper, or at least upper middle, class is pretty much the norm, because no one else can afford to break in. And, apart from on more formal shows like news broadcasts, presenters often affect a more relatable, less refined way of speaking to connect with their viewers.

Sometimes the process is a little more gradual: when an old Nineties interview clip of the presenter Claudia Winkleman started doing the rounds on Twitter/X last month, it wasn't her lack of glowing tan and eye-skimming fringe that surprised everyone, but just how much posher she sounded back then compared to now. At the same time, presenters with actual regional accents are apparently told they sound "too common" for the airwaves, as Steph McGovern (who is from Middlesbrough) has claimed.

Leith might "hate" speaking like a minor royal, but her accent comes with huge privileges, and it feels silly to downplay them. In 2022, research from the Sutton Trust found that accent bias is still a major barrier to social mobility, with attitudes towards certain accents remaining pretty much unchanged since the late Sixties. RP accents are still the highest ranked by the public in terms of "accent prestige", while those linked to "industrial cities" like Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham, as well as ethnic minority accents, were regarded as the lowest. Twenty-nine per cent of senior managers from working-class families, meanwhile, said that they had been mocked for their accent at work.

It's no wonder that so many people feel the need to smooth out the way they speak in order to get ahead, because they've probably absorbed years of snidey remarks and hints suggesting that their voice renders their contribution void. I never forgot the university interview when I had to answer questions on a random passage of literature, and the interviewer randomly suggested that I might prefer "the docks of the Mersey" to the pastoral landscape described in the book (I'm from the Wirral – like Leith's fellow *Bake Off* judge Paul Hollywood, coincidentally – so I speak with a very watered-down variant of a Liverpool accent).

If that was their response to a very mild hint of Scouse, then I hate to think how they'd have belittled someone else with a stronger accent.

So sorry, Prue, I find all the squirming a bit of a bore. Why not just own your poshness, and acknowledge all the doors it has probably opened, rather than moaning about it?

More about: [Prue Leith](#) [Accents](#)



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Text B

Text B is an article about accents in the media. It was published by *The Telegraph* in 2022.

Amol Rajan's attack on 'posh' presenters is pure inverted snobbery

The BBC man is out to end the tyranny of the well-spoken, but his complaints about a lack of 'regional, working-class' accents are misplaced



MICHAEL DEACON
COLUMNIST & ASSISTANT EDITOR

28 September 2022, 5:48pm

Thanks to the collapse of the pound, eye-watering mortgage bills, the threat of nuclear apocalypse and Gareth Southgate's refusal to replace Harry Maguire at centre-half, watching the news is already depressing enough. For the BBC's Amol Rajan, however, the experience must be even more painful.

Because he simply can't stand the newsreaders' voices.

In his view, they sound far too posh. And, as a result, he believes they're utterly unrepresentative of the wider public. According to Mr Rajan, only 10 per cent of British people speak RP, or "received pronunciation". Yet among news presenters, he claims, it's 70 per cent.

I must admit, I was surprised by this figure. Mainly because I was under the impression that at least 80 per cent of all programmes on TV and radio were now presented by Amol Rajan himself. And Rajan doesn't do RP – he speaks with a south London accent.

At any rate, Rajan is determined to end this tyranny of the well-spoken. Not only is he making a documentary on the subject, he's urged Tim Davie, the BBC's director-general, to give more jobs to people with "strong, regional, working-class" accents.

I think it's best if Davie ignores his suggestion. For the very simple reason that it's nonsense. First of all, today's news presenters are not "too posh". If Rajan thinks they are, perhaps his older colleagues could tell him how things used to be, back in the 1980s, when Rajan was at primary school. In those days, far fewer presenters had regional accents – and those who did were subjected to appalling snobbery.

For example, when Susan Rae started reading the news on Radio 4 in 1983, she received hate mail about her Scottish accent – even though it's as crisply immaculate as Miss Jean Brodie's.

Snobbery within the industry itself was just as strong. When Kay Burley of Sky News was a teenager in local radio 40 years ago, she overheard a colleague mocking her Wigan accent. The only way she was going to make it in news, she realised sadly, was to get rid of it. And as she couldn't afford elocution lessons, she trained herself, in private, to refine her vowels, using a tape recorder.

These days, both society and broadcasting are vastly less snobbish. So there's really no need to start setting quotas for regional accents. For one thing, there's little, if any, demand for it. Audiences want presenters to speak clearly, in a manner intelligible to all parts of the country. As long as you do that, they no longer care what accent you've got.

And anyway, how would the BBC go about clamping down on RP? Fire their existing presenters, as punishment for going to public school? Or order them to change their voices? It'll be like Kay Burley's experience in reverse. Instead of presenters with regional accents trying to sound posh, we'll have posh presenters trying to sound as if they've got regional accents.

In my view, complaining about RP is pure inverted snobbery.

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