

1 SPEAKING

a  Do you agree with the following statements? Why / Why not? Discuss your ideas with a partner.

- 1 Your accent is part of who you are.
- 2 It's impossible to change your accent.
- 3 It's wrong to make decisions about a person's character from their accent.

2 VOCABULARY: Words connected to spoken language

a Match the words and phrases 1–5 to the definitions a–e. Compare with a partner.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1 <input type="checkbox"/> speech | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> speech therapy |
| 2 <input type="checkbox"/> jaw | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> fluent |
| 3 <input type="checkbox"/> pronounce | |

- a the treatment of people who have difficulty speaking
- b to say a word or a letter in a particular way
- c able to speak a language easily, well and quickly
- d the lower part of your face that moves when you open your mouth
- e the activity of talking; a piece of spoken language

b  Think of three other words you know connected to spoken language. Test your partner.

3 READING 1

a Read the introduction and newspaper headlines 1–3 and answer the questions.

Which newspaper article tells the story of someone who ... ?

- 1 is able to speak another language
- 2 speaks with the accent of a different language
- 3 has a different accent to their original one

b Read articles 1–3 quickly to check your answers to 3a.

News themes: Accidental language skills

In this week's *News Themes* focus, we're taking a look at people whose accents have mysteriously changed after medical problems.

1 British woman wakes up with a Chinese accent

Sarah Colwill, from Plymouth, England, woke up after suffering a stroke to find that her speech had changed in a bizarre way – she had suddenly developed a surprising Chinese accent. Sarah, who used to have a strong local accent, has never visited China in her life and does not speak the language at all.

Sarah says that this unusual situation, her new accent, has changed her life. Now, people always ask her where she's from, and she has to explain that she has a rare medical condition called foreign accent syndrome. Sometimes people have difficulty understanding what she's saying, which is even more frustrating.

2 Facial surgery changes Texas woman's accent

Lisa Alamia was born and raised in Texas, so why is her accent British? It's not because of her family background – her family were originally from Mexico. No, Lisa's accent is the result of surgery. It was just a routine operation to correct the position of her jaw, but when she came out of hospital, it wasn't only her jaw that was different. Her husband noticed immediately that her speech had changed too.

Lisa, who used to speak with a pure Texas drawl, can't even pronounce things in the local way anymore, even after hours of speech therapy. Experts say that losing your accent is like losing part of your identity. But Lisa says if she can't learn to speak the way she used to, she doesn't mind – she's comfortable with her new accent too.

3 Learning French the hard way

British barber Rory Curtis used to study French at school, but he was never very good at it, and he soon gave up. But when he woke from a coma in a Birmingham hospital, he was able to chat with his West African nurse in fluent French. His accent was so perfect that the nurse thought one of his parents must be French. When she met them and discovered that neither of them were French speakers, she couldn't believe it.

Rory (25) can't understand his incredible new ability, and nobody has been able to explain it. But make no mistake, he didn't learn French the easy way. His six-day coma was the result of a spectacular car crash. His car was destroyed – it took 40 minutes to cut him free from the wrecked vehicle – and he was taken to hospital with serious brain damage. Rory nearly didn't survive his language learning experience.



- c** Read articles 1–3 on page 42 again more carefully and choose the best answers for questions 1–6. Be prepared to explain your answers.
- What caused Sarah's accent to change?
 - an accident
 - an illness
 - an operation
 - What do people find difficult to understand about Sarah's spoken language?
 - her Plymouth accent
 - her Chinese accent
 - her English accent
 - What was Lisa's native language?
 - American English
 - British English
 - Spanish
 - Who first noticed the change in Lisa's accent?
 - her parents
 - speech experts
 - her husband
 - What caused Rory's accent to change?
 - an accident
 - an injury
 - an operation
 - How would the West African nurse describe Rory's French?
 - like a native speaker
 - understandable
 - not very good
- d** Are the following statements true or false? Be prepared to explain your answers. Read the article again if necessary.
- Sarah Colwill isn't always happy about her new accent.
 - Lisa Alamia is relaxed about her British accent.
 - Rory Curtis finds it difficult to understand French.



BETTER READING: GUESSING THE MEANING OF NEW VOCABULARY

It's often possible to find 'clues' to the meaning of a word or phrase by thinking analytically about the information in the text, before or after it.

For example, find the word 'identity' in article 2 on page 42. Notice these 'clues' before the word:

- You can lose part of it
- It's like an accent
- Your accent is part of who you are

So your *identity* could mean 'who you are'. Now check in a dictionary.

- Look at the following words, find them in the text and underline any 'clues' to the meaning you can find in the text. Compare with a partner and then check in a dictionary.

Article 1 – bizarre, rare, frustrating

Article 2 – drawl

Article 3 – spectacular, wrecked

- Choose another word and work together to guess the meaning. Check in a dictionary.

4 READING 2

- a** Read article 4 quickly. Who do you think Debbie Morris is? Choose the best option from 1–3.
- Somebody who has foreign accent syndrome (FAS)
 - An academic
 - A nurse
- b** Put the following topics in the order they appear in article 4. The first answer is given as an example. Compare with a partner.
- How FAS can happen _____
 - A sad example of FAS _____
 - A foreign or a new accent? _____
 - Introducing the idea of FAS 1
- c** Which one of the stories in articles 1–3 on page 42 is not explained by the article about FAS below?

4 **What is foreign accent syndrome, and how is it possible?**

Imagine if you woke up with a new accent. How would it feel to suddenly speak like someone from another country? It sounds weird, but this actually does happen, and there's a name for it – foreign accent syndrome (FAS). The first recorded case was a Norwegian woman who suffered a head injury from a World War II bomb. When she regained consciousness, she spoke with a distinct German accent. This was very unfortunate because none of her neighbours would talk to her for the rest of the war. Since this case, there have been many other similar stories reported. We asked linguist Debbie Morris for a brief explanation.

What is the explanation for this weird condition?	So it isn't really a foreign accent then?
Debbie: Nobody knows for sure, but the most likely explanation is that it's all about muscle control. Speaking involves very careful movement of the lips, jaw and tongue. The very smallest change in movement of these will alter your pronunciation. Foreign accent syndrome happens when the brain is damaged and can no longer control the muscles in the same way.	Debbie: Not exactly. The patient is speaking in a way which is different from how he or she used to speak before the accident. The accent is new, but it is not foreign – it just sounds like a foreign accent to the people who hear it. For example, if the position of the tongue has been changed by the brain damage, it might change the vowels in a way which sounds Swedish or Chinese or whatever.

5 SPEAKING

- a** Read the following statements and give each one a number from 1 to 4, where 1 is *completely agree* and 4 is *completely disagree*. Compare your ideas with a partner.
- I'd like to speak English without any accent. _____
 - I like the accent of the people in the far south of my country. _____
 - I have the same accent as my parents. _____
 - I often change my accent depending on who I'm talking to. _____