

The Non-Expert: Accents

*Experts answer what they know. The Non-Expert answers anything. This week **Rosecrans Baldwin** tells us about how something as simple as a fake accent, old bean, can get you out of any old jam, ain't that right?*

*Have a question? Need some advice? Ignored by everyone else? Send your questions **via email**. The Non-Expert's Desk handles all subjects and is updated every Friday, and is written by a member of The Morning News staff.*

Question: How do I fake a British accent?—Tim L.

Answer: A bloody *great* question, Tim.

Who *doesn't* appreciate a well-faked British accent? Besides the Brits, of course, and that's only because when they visit the States they're constantly being pressed to say "shagadelic." So except for those *wankers*, doesn't the world love hearing people grind up melodic regional phrases for the sake of B-grade comedies? At least, don't we Americans love to try out funny sounds?

A fake accent—British, Swedish, Turkish, any of 'em—*can* be handy in a lot of cultural jams, especially since the entire world hates us right now. Say you're in Kingston, Jamaica, and you're afraid the cab driver will charge you triple if he finds out you're a tourist. Could a well-dropped "mon" get you local rates? Or maybe a quick *jaunt* to Slough has you surrounded by British lorry-drivers, ready to knock your head off if one Yankee vowel slips your lips? Fake accents *can* save your pocketbook and your life.

(It's also wise to have a few accents under your belt for conversation purposes. That way, when you're acting out your favorite scenes from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, people know you're Sean Connery and not Harrison Ford when you say, "Goose-stepping morons like yourself should try reading books instead of burning them." Or, as Connery puts it, "Goosh-schtepping morrrhanz like yuhrshelf should try reedenk booksh instead of bayrning them.")

Unfortunately, fake accents don't impress for long. You can live abroad all your life and still never be taken, after a few minutes' conversation, for someone born in the land. In today's lesson, we will concentrate on accents for emergencies: for example, enough to convincingly order a Guinness in Belfast, but not with a "packet of crisps" on the side.

So here we go—the luck o' the Irish to ye!

Accent: English

Scenario: A young lady you fancy has asked you up to her Islington flat for a lager and a bit of poke and tickle. She mentioned earlier she “bloody *hates*” Americans and how they’re so boring they make her feel “knackered.” Somehow you’ve managed to be completely silent until this point.

Tricks & Tips: In order to get in the door, your reply must be affirmative but not forceful, a bit droll yet self-effacing, and still include a dollop of self-hating pride.

Pause as much as possible between words. Stuff confusing, broken phrases into the gaps: “yes, well no,” “actually, very much,” “p’raps rather not,” “extremely sorry,” “right then,” or “do you mind...very?” You will be John Cleese, Emma Thompson, and, above all, Hugh Grant, rolled into one. In terms of your voice register, all sentences should have a minimum of seven peaks and four valleys. If emergency strikes, apologize and go find a queue to stand in, saying you’ll “text” her later. Then go find out what that means.

Response: “*Actually* Priscilla—I mean, well, it’s *right* polite to have us up and all but down at the pub see, well, *Priscilla*, it’s not that I *shouldn’t* but my mates and all, I mean, Bob’s your uncle, love, or he’s not and still—no, sorry, yes I’m sorry—but you don’t mind *much*, but no of course, well gosh, silly me, yes—well *goddammit Priscilla* why yes, *yes*, oh *excellent*.”

Accent: Canadian

Scenario: During a weekend trip to Ottawa you decide to stop for a cheeseburger. The restaurant looks distinctly pro-Canada—i.e., plain. With anti-American sentiment being what it is in the world right now, you figure it’s best to blend in while ordering lunch.

Tips & Tricks: You saw *Fargo* three times but never realized it was secretly cast entirely with Canadian actors—so keep that in mind. Be polite, even docile. Clip your phrases with a sharpened hockey stick. Pretend you’ve got one of the world’s greatest secrets under your hat (national health care, Vancouver, Glenn Gould, etc.). Don’t overuse the “eh” but make sure to swap “zed” for “z.” If you’re tired, say you need to “catch some zeds.” If it’s cold outside (it will be), then the hat on your head is called a “tuque” (rhymes with “duke”).

Response: “Hey there, eh, get oot one of them double cheeseburgers eh, but no elk! And how about some of them French fries, they’re real good eating, hey? And hey there, eh, how about that **space-arm**? Good going, yah?”

Accent: American, The South

Scenario: A North Carolina state trooper pulls you over for doing 108 in a 55. Unfortunately, that kind of speeding means reckless endangerment, which may get you your license repealed. You can tell in the rear-view that Mr. Trooper is an old-school good ol' boy, the kind who's happy to send a Yankee home on a bus, or even better, in a shoebox.

Tips & Tricks: Speak slowly and melodically and *do* be charming. Let sentences roll to a stop. You're in the land where manners and family—or, more to the point, money and breeding—do matter. As with the Canadian “eh,” be conservative in spitting out “y'all,” but don't be afraid of colloquialisms; even an aristocratic Southerner will be charmed with country wisdom. Above all, be polite, address elders as “sir” or “ma'am,” and assume a look of gentle surprise when people seem less than pleasant—the poor things just weren't raised right.

Response: “Why good *afternoon* officer, I'm headin' down to Rolly right now, must've gotten carried away there—now hey, d'you see them Heels play last night, or don't tell me you're a State fan, why my pa went to State and my mama, well she was at Carolina and I'll you what, we got ourselves a real wolfpack now, you know what I'm *sayin'*?”

Accent: American, New England

Scenario: On vacation in Bar Harbor, Maine, with your husband, you decide to stop for lobster rolls. Rumor has it the locals get the claw and tail meat, *and* the cheapest prices, while the green gunk and leg bits are reserved for out-of-staters.

Tips & Tricks: There are a number of accents in New England, from Boston's “cah tahk” to Connecticut's vanilla-Peter Jennings impressions, but it's Maine where the tones are clearest and most extreme. Be forthright, clear spoken, and in no way hokey. Say less wherever possible, and never assume an acquaintance. Pretend you ate granite for breakfast—*not that you're bragging*. Phrases have a start, middle, and finish. In terms of the melody's cadence, your phrase starts at the bottom of a short mountain and must end up on the other side. A correctly pronounced “de-yah” (for “dear”) or “a-yuh” (for God only knows what) can win you points on the coast, but you're better off communicating by saying nothing; locals will appreciate your modesty.

Response: Nod toward the sign that says “LOBSTER ROLLS.” Hold up two fingers. Nod again, shuffle feet.

Accent: Irish

Scenario: After a short Dublin breakfast, it's time for a drink. You find a pub suitably

Irish without an obvious thing for tourists. Local contractors on their coffee break watch your entrance. The bartender nods and asks what you'd like.

Tips & Tricks: The Irish accent is one of the world's most beautiful, and nobody knows it better than the Irish. Frankly, you don't stand a chance of sliding by. Your best bet is to impersonate Colin Farrell on a bender and punch out the whole crowd.

Response: Don't even try it. They will kill you.

Accent: New Zealand/Australian/South African White/Nomadic Dutch

Scenario: Staying at a youth hostel somewhere in the world (it doesn't matter where, they're *everywhere*), you run into an extremely friendly and gregarious New Zealander/Australian/South African White/Nomadic Dutch who wants to split a joint with one of her countrymen and then bash American environmental policies.

Tips & Tricks: To the untrained American ear, it's almost impossible to tell the difference between all these accents. Flatten your vowels and always remain upbeat, preferably aggressively open-minded. When possible, pronounce your statement as a rhetorical question with a rising tail, ending with "yeah?"

Response: Smile and throw a hang-ten sign. Even if your new friend doesn't surf (very unlikely), she knows surfers are always down to talk about climate change, and most likely are carrying some really dank stuff in their nug sacks.



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