

## Episode 1: Backgrounds and Accents

### Summary

As a way of introducing themselves in the first episode of English in 10 Minutes, married couple Nick and Wendy talk about their different backgrounds as native English speakers and how this has affected their accents.

### Transcript

Nick: Welcome to the very first episode of English in 10 Minutes. My name is Nick and I'm here with my wife Wendy. And as a way of introducing ourselves today, we thought we would talk to you about our background and our accents. So, Wendy, where are you from?

Wendy: I am originally from Mobile, Alabama, in the Deep South of the United States.

Nick: OK, and so, the Deep South is obviously a geographical term, but it's also a cultural designation as well, right?

Wendy: Yeah, very much so. And I'd say it's almost more cultural than geographical, because, uhh, Florida, for example, uhh, goes down even further south than Alabama, but south Florida is not really part of the Deep South. Umm, Florida has a very different culture than, uhh, the states that are considered to be part of the Deep South, so that would be Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, those states in the southeastern corner of the U.S.

Nick: And so, you have states that are considered the South, and then these few states that you mentioned that even within that, they are the Deep South. So, typically, what does that mean if you're from the Deep South? What does it mean for your culture and your identity and things like that?

Wendy: Well, I'm not sure I'm the best person to ask this because I don't really identify that much as a southerner anymore. It's been a long time since I lived there. Uhh, it is my home, I was born there and grew up there. I lived there until I was 18 years old, uhh, but then I left and went to college in Florida, in the next state over, uhh, and now I've been away from the U.S. for about 17 years. So, uhh, yeah, in some ways I kind of feel like a foreigner when I go back there. It doesn't ... it still feels like home, but I've changed a lot since I lived there.

But, in general, uhh, what does it mean to be part of the Deep South? Well, umm, you know, the cultural divide<sup>1</sup> between the North and the South goes back to the Civil War, the Amer ... the U.S. Civil War that took place in the 1860s, so, you know, there are a lot of stereotypes about the South, and there's always some truth in stereotypes, and there are good ones and bad ones, you know, positive and negative stereotypes, so the negative stereotype is that it's racist, uhh, because there's a lot of racial tension there, this is where slavery was most prominent<sup>2</sup>, uhh, in the U.S. and that's largely what the Civil War was fought about. Umm, but on the other hand, southerners are known for being very hospitable, very friendly, very, you know, welcoming, and kind-hearted, uhh, which may seem like a contrast and of course it is. Uhh, so it is ... it is an area of contrasts but it's a beautiful place, umm, very warm weather, sunny weather, umm, and, yeah, people are generally very friendly but also kind of insular<sup>3</sup>, looking inward and maybe not that interested in the rest of the outside world.

Nick: OK, and people from the South tend to have, uhh, quite a particular accent...

Wendy: Yep.

Nick: And this is, even ... it's perhaps not quite an accent. It's often called a drawl<sup>4</sup> or a twang<sup>5</sup> or a word like that to describe it. It's just a little different from a typical, standard American accent.

Wendy: Mmm-hmm.

Nick: But, you don't have that anymore.

Wendy: No, I don't. I lost it along the way, I guess, and I don't know exactly how that happened. I think it was just a natural, umm, gradual process, uhh, because, like I said, I have lived away from the United States, uhh, for 17 years and away from the South for more than 20 years now. So I've had lots of different influences since then, and, you know, I have friends from all over the world, and I've just started speaking a more, kind of, generic form of English. I think my accent is still

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<sup>1</sup> cultural divide: a common expression to describe differences in culture. You can also have a linguistic divide and many other types of divides.

<sup>2</sup> prominent: something that stands out; Wendy means that slavery was more common there.

<sup>3</sup> insular: as Wendy explains, it means that the people look inward rather than outward, that they aren't interested in other places outside their region.

<sup>4</sup> drawl: a slow way of speaking.

<sup>5</sup> twang: not a completely different accent, but a variation in pronunciation.

American. People still ... it's very clear to most English speakers when I speak that I'm American, but they never guess that I'm a southerner. Umm...

Nick: And you said that, 'cause one of the thing that southerns often say when they're talking about 'you' in the plural form, is they say y'all<sup>6</sup>, and you said that you had to stop saying that <sup>7</sup>.

Wendy: Yes, that is the one difference that I did make consciously. Everything else I think just happened naturally and gradually once I left, but I do remember when I moved to Florida, to go to college there, I noticed that people around me didn't say 'y'all', and, uhh, before it was something that I never even thought about. I would say it without realising it. but I had to ... I decided to stop saying it because I wanted to fit in with, uhh, the new people around me and my new environment, so that's one conscious change that I did make.

Nick: Although 'y'all' is actually quite helpful.

Wendy: Yes.

Nick: Because we have you plural and you singular, and there's no way to differentiate them, and so having this 'you all', which is 'y'all', uhh, is quite helpful, but it does mark you as a southerner for sure.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, definitely.

Nick: OK, so that's you done.

Wendy: Yes, so tell us about you then, Nick. What's your background?

Nick: I was born and I grew up in Australia, and so this is obviously an English-speaking country, and we also have a, uhh, certain Australian accent, umm, which I've also lost, apparently.

Wendy: Umm-hmm.

Nick: So I speak now with what I call a neutral accent or an international accent, and essentially nobody can really guess where I'm from. Umm, British people think it's American, American people think it's British, Australian people don't really know and usually think it's American as well, umm, and then sometimes if I tell them that

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<sup>6</sup> y'all: an unofficial contraction of 'you all' that is used in the American south. In the Australian countryside, people use 'youse' to mean the same thing.

<sup>7</sup> consciously: deliberately; Wendy made an effort to stop saying y'all.

I'm Australian, they'll be ... firstly they'll be very surprised, and then secondly they'll say, "Oh you can hear it just every now and then. In some words you can hear it."

But I think that's a nice, umm ... I don't know, I think it's a nice thing to have that people aren't really sure where I'm from. So perhaps that means I get to avoid some of these stereotypes like the ones that you mentioned. When people first meet me, they don't have, necessarily, preconceived ideas<sup>8</sup> about who I am based on where I'm from.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah, that's very true. Yeah, I actually often don't like to tell people that I'm from Alabama just because I know that they'll have those preconceived ideas and I don't identify with those, I don't think that I fit into those ideas, umm, so I do like having this neutral American accent where people don't really know where I'm from.

Nick: I think that's fair enough in both of our cases because we've lived in a lot of different places and we've travelled to a lot of different places, so we've picked up, uhh, little cultural things along the way and linguistic things along the way as well. And so sometimes I don't even necessarily realise that a certain phrase might be Australian or it might not be, or where I picked that up<sup>9</sup>. Umm, we have a lot of American friends and we have a lot of British friends as well.

Wendy: Mmm-hmmm.

Nick: And so I think it's fair to say that we have a kind of international outlook on life, uhh, and that's also reflected in the way that we speak English.

Wendy: Yep, that's very true.

Nick: Umm, but the Australian accent in general, what do you think of it?

Wendy: Umm, I know what you think of it. No, uhh, it's ... I think it fits the persona of the Australian people, you know, which is very laid-back<sup>10</sup>, very friendly, very casual. Umm, you know, which is kind of the stereotype of Australians, that they like to go to the beach, they like to have barbecues and relax, and that they're very friendly, and they are, and I think that is reflected in the way that they speak. It's definitely not a formal, kind of, structured ... umm, you know, when you compare it to British example for example, I think it's obvious that it's much less formal. People use a lot of nicknames, they shorten words all the time and have, kind of, fun ways of saying things.

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<sup>8</sup> preconceived ideas: ideas or views based on stereotypes.

<sup>9</sup> picked that up: in this context, to pick up something is to acquire it in an unconscious way.

<sup>10</sup> laid-back: not stressful, easy going, informal.

Nick: Yeah and it's an accent that can be difficult for people to understand.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: We have friends who are non-native speakers who have trouble with certain Australian ... other Australian friends of ours that they don't understand as well as they understand other people. And we were talking to someone just the other that they knew a lot of people who really struggled with the Australian accent.

Wendy: Umm-hmm.

Nick: But hopefully that won't be the case, uhh, for all of our listeners.

Wendy: No, I don't think so.

Nick: OK, so that's it for today.

## Comprehension Questions

1. According to Wendy, why is there a contrast in the culture of people from the Deep South of the United States?
2. What was the one change Wendy consciously made to try to stop talking like a southerner?
3. Why does Nick like having a neutral accent?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. I had a great holiday, everything was really \_\_\_\_\_ and relaxing.
2. Because of its population and economy, China is one of the most \_\_\_\_\_ countries in Asia.
3. There has always been a large \_\_\_\_\_ between the west and the east.
4. Sorry, I didn't mean to offend you. I wasn't doing it \_\_\_\_\_.
5. When you tell someone you're from a certain country, they will usually have all sorts of \_\_\_\_\_ about who are you even if they don't know you.
6. People from the countryside often speak with a \_\_\_\_\_ that sounds different from people from a city.
7. I've started saying 'like' all the time. I don't know where I \_\_\_\_\_.
8. North Korea is a very \_\_\_\_\_ country. People there don't have much exposure to other countries.
9. I went on holiday in the Deep South and now I can't stop saying \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Wendy speaks with a standard American accent but her mother definitely has a southern \_\_\_\_\_ when she speaks.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Have you been to the Deep South of the United States? What did you think of it? If you haven't been, would you like to go? Why or why not?
2. Wendy says the Australian accent fits the Australian culture. Do you think this can be true of a language or an accent? What are some other examples of this?
3. Nick said that non-native speakers can have difficulty understanding the Australian accent. Which English accent do you have the most trouble understanding?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. The contrast is that people are known for being friendly but also for being racist, two ideas that don't seem to go together.
2. Wendy stopped saying 'y'all', the southern way to contract 'you all'.
3. He likes it because if people can't tell where he's from when they first meet him, they can't form pre-conceived ideas about him based on national stereotypes.

### Exercises

1. laid-back
2. prominent
3. cultural divide
4. consciously
5. pre-conceived ideas
6. drawl
7. picked that up
8. insular
9. y'all
10. twang