

Can I be an intelligent person?

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Even though I have been a student at the Chinese University of Hong Kong for almost two months and can access the library and the campus with my student card, I still feel like an outsider there. Why identification fails? This is due to my poor English. Students who graduate from renowned schools are frequently regarded as an intelligent group, so am I one of them? My response is no, as I still "struggle" with English which is most fundamental qualities of intelligence. Upon reflecting on the logic of this, I come to the realization that I have unconsciously drawn the correlation between intelligence and English proficiency. But how was this correlation drawn? This requires examining my English learning experience to look for signs of how the idea of a person who is proficient in English as being intelligent is constructed.

Prior to 2009, the vast majority of people in my hometown live far from the English-speaking world. Apparently only cosmopolitan cities like Beijing and Shanghai have access to English. At that time, social media was less integrated into everyday life, the majority of the mass media that residents used to form their perceptions of English-speakers was television. English speakers were frequently portrayed as being well-groomed, employed by large corporations, living in international cities, mingling and laughing with foreigners, and projecting an air of success. As a result, people around me view those who have a good command of English as having an aura. My parents also "planned" my future at the time, telling me that I should excel at learning English to work as a white-collar employee for a foreign company in the future.

After 2009, I started junior high school and began taking English classes on a regular basis. English became one of the requirements for me to meet the definition of "intelligent students" because I was in an advanced class where students are regarded as being more intelligent than students in other classes. We were expected to memorize grammar with only slight variations and a bunch of unusual words that had no real use. However, I received below-average English grades in the class, and the most frequent advice I got from my teachers was to "Don't let the English language hold you back." Since context is a crucial and essential component of cultural studies, I'm also attempting to analyze the context of my systematic English learning here. Unlike now, when English is stumbled in the Chinese education system. The Chinese government had vowed to draw the world's attention to China ever since the Beijing Olympics in

2008. But how will they accomplish this goal? Without a doubt, English is a useful tool. While I was studying English systematically, I came across China's second opportunity to demonstrate the nation's soft power to the outside world - the Shanghai World Expo, where the concept of "Expo Diplomacy" was introduced.

Around 2012, the London accent became really popular in China. A girl, 15 or 16, with a natural London accent was reported by an online news outlet. The news first gave this young woman's background: She attended an international school while growing up and studying in Shanghai. In addition to complimenting her "charming" London accent. The news praised her "charming" London accent in addition to pointing out that her English was as natural as that of a native speaker. The word "clever" was frequently used to describe the girl in the comments made by those who were present. Can you believe she has no experience studying abroad but speaks perfect English? She is truly too awesome, someone said.

This news shows us a "standard" English speaker, from a cosmopolitan background, well-educated and speaking "proper" English, she is undoubtedly the best sample of intelligence. This news was shown in my class by the English teacher. The girl in the news not only aroused the envy of the class but also spread "London accent hit" among the students. I was, however, perplexed at the time. When I was younger, I was told to only speak Mandarin and not Hokkien, and once I started junior high school, I was reprimanded for reading aloud English texts with a Chinese accent and teased for speaking Chinese with a Hokkien accent. But a London accent wasn't just English with an accent or a kind of dialect in British? I raised these questions with my classmates and teachers, and I received these kinds of replies: My teacher accused me of being a sophist and unwilling to learn from others' positive traits. Some of my fellow students said that you didn't think the London accent sounded particularly advanced, while the Hokkien accent was too low. Others claimed that speaking English with a London accent sounds more impressive and Chinglish was totally incorrect. Still other students didn't think my issue was a problem at all. These comments make it clear that the London accent connotes positive words like good, advanced, and smart, whereas the Chinese English or Hokkien accent is the "opposite," connoting negative things. That such a reaction would take place was actually not surprising to me; after all, the "please speak Mandarin" signs that were plastered throughout the school and the media's emphasis on authentic English were enhancing English's "aura." From their responses, we can also find the fact that "Chinese with an accent is low level, while English with an accent (only the native-speaker's accent) is high-ranking" this discourse becomes a common sense.

In summary, you can see a picture like this: One of the girls previously mentioned has the "advanced" fluent orthodox London accent, while the other speaks English stutteringly and with a "low" Chinese accent. Who has more so-called cultural legitimacy for the term "intelligence"? The answer is obvious.

Even though I believed it to be absurd that English could be used as a barometer of intelligence, I was deeply and subconsciously drawn to such a discourse. I am always impressed by someone's intelligence when I hear them speak English fluently. I am forced to find my own subject position, which is that I am not an intelligent person because of my limited English, as Barker concludes ideology theory from Althusser, "subjects are the effects of discourse because subjectivity is constituted by the positions which discourse obliged us to take up."¹

¹ Barker, Chris, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. 5th ed. (SAGE, 2016), 73.