Hotels, dialects, and accents go together. You walk out of the door of a hotel in an English-speaking country and find yourself swimming in an auditory bath of local speech. Sometimes you find yourself trying to stay afloat, for there are more variations in English in the world today than there have ever been before, and some are so unfamiliar that you can struggle to understand them.

It's a consequence of English having become a world language - a global lingua franca. More than two billion people speak it now, and in every country in the world where English is used, local identities are expressed in local English. It was ever thus. When English arrived in the British Isles in the 5th century AD, the new settlers came from various parts of northern Europe, and brought with them different ways of speaking. And as their speech developed into the language that would one day be called English, these dialects multiplied. Today, you'll find differences in accent (pronunciation) and dialect (grammar and vocabulary) every 25 miles or so, as you travel around Britain. The differences can be even more noticeable in the cities. Stand in your hotel foyer, and listen to the Englishes spoken by those coming and going. You'll hear a huge variety.

Hotels by their nature are perfect places for doing dialect research. And what you hear will not only be visitors from the north, south, east, and west of Britain. You'll hear dialects expressing the local identities of people from all over the world - American, Canadian, Australian, Indian, Nigerian, Polish... I sat in a foyer once, near reception, and made notes of the accents I was hearing. I reached 50 in an hour - and there were probably more, as there were some I couldn't identify. (There were half-a-dozen behind the reception desk, too.)

Of course, these days you don't even need to leave your home to encounter linguistic diversity. All you have to do is access the internet, which has become an increasingly spoken medium over the past decade. Thanks to YouTube and all the other ways in which we can listen (as opposed to read) online, we have an opportunity today to hear the accents and dialects of the English-speaking world in a way that was never possible before. Some websites...
Do you know your whistle from your wheest?

Test your knowledge of dialects in our bostin' quiz

Where would you be...

A. If a group of children were “doing the beak”.

B. If you heard a little girl talking about her grandma and grandpa as nain and tald?

C. If you heard someone calling their children bairns?

D. If you heard someone calling a back alley a ginnel.

E. Someone told you you had a “longtail” in your kitchen.

F. If you heard someone saying that something was “gear”?

G. You heard someone describe tourists as “grockles”.

H. If someone told you to “Haud yer wheest!”

I. If you heard someone compliment a man’s dress sense by saying: “Nice whistle.”

J. If you heard someone describing a good meal as “bostin’ fittle”.

K. If you heard someone calling their kittens, chets?

L. If someone with a rip shouted, “I’ve rent me trousers”.

Answers on page 14
THE ENGLISH VOCABULARY TEST

We love regional dialects so much here at DND that we've come up with some brilliant, descriptive and sometimes downright bonkers words we think should be adopted by the whole of the British Isles:

Jitty
noun In Leicestershire, paths, alleyways, particularly between houses.
Usage: "Giz a croggy up the jitty, Kev." Croggy is "a lift on the back of someone's bike".

Dimpsy
adjective A Somerset term that describes the half-light usually at dusk.
Usage: "Well, Rosie, reckon the evening's dimpsy enough for a cheeky cider at The Three-legged Mare."

Brozzen
adjective Hailing from the Yorkshire Dales, this term denotes a feeling of discomfort caused by consuming too much hearty fare.
Usage: "Ee, there's so much puddin' in me belly, I'm reet brozzen."

Gopping
adjective A Manchester judgement, pronouncing something rather unattractive.
Usage: "Take that gopping mutt away before he turns me stomach to porridge."

I often hear people in southern England say "I haven't got an accent"

The variations tell other people where you're from, and there are no exceptions, because everyone has an accent and speaks a dialect.

This can come as a surprise. I often hear people in southern England say, "I haven't got an accent" or "I don't speak a dialect".

What they're thinking of is the fact that, in England, the standard English way of speaking, and the associated "received pronunciation" (the traditional voice of the upper classes and the BBC) conveys no information about their geographical origin. But, of course, adopt a wider perspective, and it's obvious how limited a view this is. From
Tittermatotter
noun The Norfolk word for a child's seesaw.
Usage: I've been up and down so many times today, I might as well be on a tittermatotter.

Nesh
adjective A Nottinghamshire term meaning susceptible to the cold. Often used as a rebuke to "soft" southerners.
Usage: "I say, it's a tad parky." "Nah, pet, you're a bit nesh is all."

Baffies
noun Term used by the peoples of the east coast of Scotland for a pair of slippers.
Usage: "Chuck them baffies over to me, hen, me feet are colder than a politician's heart."

Tranklements
noun The way West Midlanders might describe ornaments or geegaws.
Usage: "Her's got more tranklements on that mantelpiece than the British blummin' Museum."

Guddle
verb Used in Northumberland and parts of Scotland to refer to a good old rummage.
Usage: "Have a guddle in that drawer, Mary, and see if you can't find my truss."

of London and towards London, which has brought accents and dialects into fresh contact with each other. The result is an amalgam – a new "combined" way of speaking, most noticeable in the "Estuary English" spoken in the London area, and spreading throughout commuterland.

Second, immense immigration – formerly from the British Commonwealth, with Caribbean, Indian, and West African ways of speaking in the forefront, but more recently from the countries of the European Union. While levels of fluency in English do vary, there are now many local communities in Britain where second- or third-generation speakers are now natively fluent, speaking in an accent and dialect that is a mix of their new home base and their ethnic origin. Once there was just Scouse or Brummie or Geordie or Cockney...

Now there is "Chinese Scouse", "Jamaican Brummie", "Bangla Cockney", and as many combinations as there are people to combine. What's especially interesting is to see the way in which some of these new ways of speaking, reflecting a community's identity, are influencing people from outside those communities. "Innit" is a case in point, ➤
The controversial Urban Dictionary, now has almost eight million entries

Answers to Quiz
A=8 Belfast (It's playing truant)
B=5 Wales
C=1 Northeast or Scotland
D=4 Yorkshire or Lancashire
E=10 Isle of Man (it's a rat)
F=2 Liverpool area (means excellent)
G=11 Isle of Wight
H=9 Scotland (means shut up)
I=6 London (whistle & flute - suit)
J=7 Birmingham
K=3 Devon
L=12 Norfolk

Readers competition
Father and son team Dan and David Crystal have written an authoritative, entertaining book about our accents and what they say about us.

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