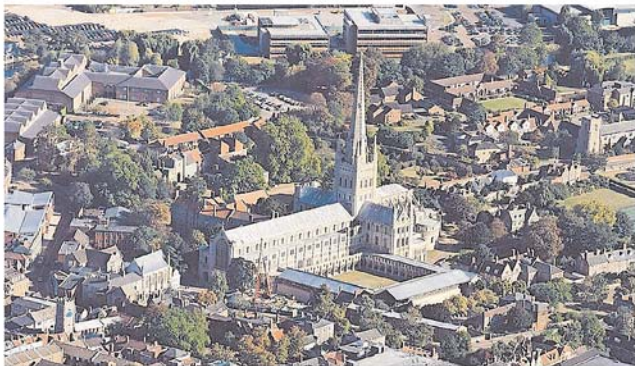


Speak out loud and be proud of your Norfolk accent

Peter Trudgill



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■ Norwich - and Norfolk - have much to be proud of - and that includes our accent says Peter Trudgill.

Picture: MIKE PAGE

It was an interesting day for me linguistically.

I was on the west coast of the USA. About 9pm, at a party, an American woman came up to me and said: "I just love your accent - it's beautiful!"

Then, about an hour later, I downloaded the iPad edition of that day's EDP - Oregon time is eight hours behind Norwich time - and found Steve Downes also talking about my accent (and his).

But Steve was taking a very different line.

"Our regional accent," asserted Steve, "can make us sound a bit slow. Just ask people from outside Norfolk."

"Sometimes," reckons Steve, "the truth hurts." But, Steve, it's not the truth! That woman was from outside Norfolk, and she didn't think my Norfolk accent made me sound "a bit slow". She thought it made me sound intelligent and authoritative.

I don't agree with Steve that it is hypocritical to alter the way you speak according to context. Most people do that quite naturally and spontaneously.

But I do agree with Steve that we must hope for a future where it is what we say that matters, not the accent we say it in.

Steve, though, is not helping matters at

all if he believes that, when he speaks in his native local accent, he comes across as "slow". He's got to stop believing that. I don't believe it.

But I acknowledge that Steve is not alone - sadly, many people in Norfolk do feel that way. They've been brainwashed by the ignorant attitudes of "people from outside Norfolk".

We should not waste our time asking such people what they think, as Steve suggests.

On the contrary, we should work on what we think about our accent ourselves. There's nothing inherently stupid-sounding about our accent at all. Such judgments are, as Steve rightly says, lazy

stereotypes. And they are based on perceptions about particular places.

Let us remind ourselves that Norwich is a famous city, with a distinguished history, a high-level university, a cutting-edge research park, a lively cultural scene, a population of a quarter of a million and, sometimes, a Premier League football team.

We have no need to feel inferior to anyone about the accent that belongs to our city, or anything else.

I just love your accent, Steve. The USA is full of people who think it makes you sound intelligent and authoritative. Why don't you decide you feel the same way about it yourself?