

## Ants don't sleep

Do you believe that ants don't sleep? Do you believe that a giraffe can go without water longer than a camel? Whether or not you believe these statements depends on who says them.

Apparently, if a person with a foreign accent told you these things you wouldn't believe them.

Why? According to research at the University of Chicago a foreign accent reduces credibility in ways that the speaker and the listener don't consciously realize. Because an accent makes a person harder to understand, listeners are less likely to treat what they say as truthful. The credibility decreases even more as the accent thickens.

*ScienceDaily* summarized the study as a way "to test the impact of accent on credibility. American participants were asked to judge the truthfulness of trivia statements by native or non-native speakers of the English language", and provided top line findings from the research.

Boaz Keysar is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Chicago and an expert on communication. Keysar says: "The results have important implications for how people perceive non-native speakers of a language, particularly as mobility increases in the modern world leading millions of people to be non-native speakers of the language they use daily. The accent makes it harder for people to

understand what the non-native speaker is saying. They misattribute the difficulty of understanding the speech to the truthfulness of the statements".

This is perhaps the most relevant outcome of the study for commercial writers and producers. If people cannot be clearly understood they cannot be believed. We don't disbelieve consciously—the accent tricks us into thinking we don't believe it simply because we don't understand it. Now what?

There are many great commercials with so-called foreign accents in them. Clever writing and a unique sound makes these commercials really pop. Such commercials have been running for years—we can only assume they work or the creative would have changed ages ago.

The unmistakable voice of Hugh Heron of Heathwood Homes is just that—unmistakable. His voice oozes credibility due in large part to the fact that he always speaks with sincerity. While the occasional word or phrase in his thick Scottish accent may be difficult to wrap your ear around, the overall tone of his voice makes Hugh's commercials stand out. He told me recently that people he meets on the street treat him like a friend because they feel like they've met him before. His voice is unique and memorable. That's why his commercials work.

One of my favourite commercials makes fun of the stereotypical human



response to people who don't speak your language. "Good Morning, is this the information desk?"... the opening line in this classic spot for SAS Airlines features an American speaking to a European he believes doesn't understand him. So, the American speaks English, but does so extremely loudly and extremely slowly. As it happens he is speaking to a British man who speaks English very well, thank you very much! Ironically, the American is overseas and the tables are turned—now he is the man with the supposed accent.

So is there a place for foreign accents in radio advertising?

I'm not entirely sure, but what I do know is that participants in the Radio Power Tools research gave low scores to commercials that contained a foreign accent if it was "a voice that drips with a non-mainstream accent spoken only by a small group within the population, and used for no apparent reason".

Clearly the operative here is "no apparent reason". So, if it makes sense to include a voice with an accent do so with purpose. I would also suggest using a voice with a genuine accent instead of trying to replicate one. You'll be disappointed with the finished sound of the piece and your client will be disappointed with the results of their advertising unless your voice talent can truly nail that accent they don't naturally possess.

So, do ants sleep or not? According to *BBC Earth*, on average a single worker ant in Britain takes 250 naps a day, but they're only a minute long. The Queen falls asleep at far more regular intervals than her royal subjects. Guess they can't understand a word she says.

Maureen Bulley is president of THE RADIO STORE. She may be reached at 1-888-DO RADIO or at [dorado@total.net](mailto:dorado@total.net).

**New Pricing!**

### Breakthrough Pricing on all Ross openGear DAs!

**SRA-8601A-R2**  
3G / HD / SD SDI  
Reclocking Amplifier  
Highest quality 3G / HD / SD SDI  
reclocking distribution amplifier  
Was \$1,180  
**New low price \$499**

... plus a chance to win an iPad!

Sample New Pricing:

Visit [WWW.rossvideo.com/da](http://WWW.rossvideo.com/da) today!