

Voice from Jamaica divides Radio 4 listeners

By Terry Kirby

Chief Reporter



His voice has appalled and delighted Middle England's Radio 4 listeners in equal measure. And Neil Nunes, the continuity announcer¹⁾ whose Jamaican accent caused the controversy, is finding life in the front line less than appealing.

The BBC – described by Greg Dyke when he was director general, as “hideously white” – is extremely sensitive about a row with overtones of both political correctness and racism, and is so concerned about inflaming passions further that it has refused to disclose any details about Nunes or release his photograph, although one has been obtained by *The Independent*. Nunes, who is British but was brought up in Jamaica, has said he does not wish to talk about the controversy.

A heated debate has begun on the BBC's online forum, with almost 200 contributions, divided almost equally between those who approve and those who do not. One of the strongest critics said: “We wish to hear intelligent speech on Radio 4 and we wish to hear it well-spoken ... We wish to hear British English, in all its varieties, including received

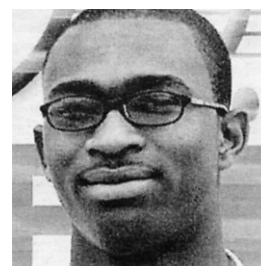
pronunciation. We do not wish to hear the English language spoken by accents from other parts of the globe.” Other forum messages praised his voice for its clarity. “How refreshing, at last, to hear tones which aren't white, Anglo-Saxon and Little England,” said one.

Mark Damazer, the controller of Radio 4, defended Nunes' appointment and dismissed any suggestion that it smacked of ‘token’ political correctness. “The entry path to Radio 4 has no racial, demographic, geographic or sexual dimensions,” he said. “He's a black Briton, just as I'm a white Briton and other people are Asian Britons and so on ... he's a perfectly appropriate voice to have on Radio 4.”

The radio critic Jane Thynne said Mr Damazer's intervention suggested the station would stick by Mr Nunes.

“They can't sack a black continuity announcer simply because Middle England has complained. But if his pronunciation doesn't improve, he is likely to be shifted to less obvious evening slots,” she said.

Radio 4 has a history of large-scale listener opposition to any innovation, such as the recent decision to axe Fritz Spiegl's “UK Theme” which starts the station's programming each day.



The row over the voice of the Radio 4 announcer Neil Nunes has ruffled feathers at Broadcasting House

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noot 1 continuity announcer: iemand die op een zender programma's aan elkaar praat, aan- en afkondigen en overige programma-gerelateerde mededelingen doet

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- 3p 29 Geef voor elk van de onderstaande beweringen aan of deze wel of niet in overeenstemming is met de inhoud van het artikel.
- 1 De BBC heeft het Nunes verboden om in het openbaar mededelingen over zijn werkomstandigheden te doen.
 - 2 De kritische opmerkingen op het BBC-forum richten zich voornamelijk op het eenvoudige taalgebruik van Nunes.
 - 3 Klachten over Nunes' Engels zullen volgens Jane Thynne voor de BBC aanleiding zijn om hem binnenkort te ontslaan.
 - 4 Luisteraars naar Radio 4 zijn over het algemeen weinig veranderingsgezind.
 - 5 Mark Damazer impliceert dat Nunes uitsluitend op zijn professionele kwaliteiten is aangenomen.
- Noteer het nummer van elke bewering, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".

Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.