

Don't be fooled by the accent: Lessons from the Onyum tragedy

Do not, for any reason, stop peeping at your neighbours through the window or eavesdropping on random conversations.



Just Saying with Janet Napio

Most of us are impressed by people who are well spoken. I know some people whose list of requirements for people to surround themselves with includes being well spoken.

Usually, when the well-spoken person starts to talk, you listen to them, give them attention, even for a second to hear what they have to say.

They are often seen as better than others whose mother tongue influence grows stronger with age; those whose Ls and Rs seem to hold them back from fully flourishing.

In school, those are the children who were the teacher's biscuit; they were the ones who easily got a ticket to student leadership, they were befriended and given things by those who looked at them as superior because of their American English.

It was even easier for them to make up stories about non-existent trips abroad.

Never mind that some of these

accents were acquired from movies and music. Although some were actually acquired from life abroad.

It is 2026, and our toddlers speak with cartoon English using vocabulary we only learnt at our first jobs and still, the allure of an American accent remains. Some teachers and parents are extremely impressed with children who speak like Bluey or Mickey Mouse. They think of it as being advanced. Intelligence in some quarters is measured by how well spoken someone is in English.

Security guards at many premises are no exception to this allure. The way they check an individual who arrives in a car, speaking like James Bond and calling them ma'am instead of Askari, is not the same way they will check mere mortals.

So, I was here thinking about the woman who attended to Christopher Okello Onyum, the man who murdered those children at Ggaba Early Development Centre, when he pretended to be a parent who was interested in the school's services.

He must have used all his polite words while speaking to her. Please, thank you, excuse me, to which number may I send the money, ma'am? I do not think she could have imagined in her wildest dreams that moments later, he would turn into a blood thirsty maniac. (Although he does look



blood thirsty).

They say not to judge a book by its cover, but eh, sometimes the book looks so harmless. Anyway, Onyum changed how I look at people with certain adored accents, but also reminds us to keep our antennas up.

Of course, some things are completely out of our control, but some are not. For instance, it is in your power to be nosy, curious and inquisitive.

What matters is the art of being the above things without appearing obvious. Pretend to mind your business, but keep the busy body in you alive.

Do not, for any reason, stop peeping at your neighbours through the window or eavesdropping on random conversations.

Also, listen to your gut, it is usually onto something. Why in the world don't you know your neighbour's name or have their phone number? If they won't

initiate contact, be the adult, walk up to them, introduce yourself and take their number and then proceed to watch them discreetly.

Do not be blinded by the facade of the super nice neighbour. People have dark secrets behind all that charm. Basically, stay woke.

Knowing your neighbour's name or number is not a guarantee of safety but it is the bare minimum we can do.

This is not to sow seeds of fear or mistrust of our neighbourhoods. I am just saying. You never know.

Finally, brethren, 'speak with your chest' even if your ancestors are influencing your tongue like no man's business.

You are a more useful addition to society than blood thirsty Onyum and his American accent. Mbu, "I only speak English, ma'am". Mtcheewwww even!

There is no discount on rent

or the price of fuel for people who say data instead of deyta. You might get a little attention momentarily, but you will still have to use the same potholed road as the rest of us.

Speaking of potholes, who turned Ndagire Road near Naalya/Kyaliwajala into a potato garden because what in the world is that?! How much accented English do we have to speak for the powers that be to fix that road? What happened to the occasional marrum you used to fill the holes with?

Did it run out or is it because we do not have American accents? Do we also need to first go to Kyankwanzi to fight about the NRM bedroom? Fix the road or at least pretend to. Where were we? Yes, stay vigilant.

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