

## Language and Social Class in Britain

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Britain has long been regarded as a highly class-conscious society, with connotations of privilege and prejudice. Although divisions have recently become blurred, social class occupies an important position in British society and class identity remains strong. The way that people speak is obviously related to their social class background, and sociolinguistic research has determined that there are significant correlations between social class and language. Such studies can help us to better understand social structure and the development and maintenance of social relationships. This paper reviews a number of studies which have helped us to understand the nature of the varieties of English used by different strata of society in Britain. After a brief outline of the social class structure, the linguistic features of different social varieties are described. Some of the social and educational problems resulting from linguistic prejudice and dialect discrimination are then discussed.

### Key Words (キーワード)

Social stratification (社会階層), Standard English dialect (『標準語』とされている方言), Non-standard dialects (方言), Linguistic variation (言葉の多様性), Dialect discrimination (方言による差別).

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Great Britain, along with the United States of America, is considered as being the home of one of the two great international branches of English. "British English" has traditionally been taught in schools and universities throughout Europe and many other parts of the world. In Britain, then, the linguistic situation would seem to be quite straightforward: the people all speak British English, which means that they all speak in more or less the same way ... or do they? Things are a little more complicated than they may first seem. While it is certainly the case that the vast majority of Britons do speak English as their first language, the way they speak and use the language varies considerably. Just ask any foreign learners of British English who have recently arrived in the country: the chances are that they will complain about how little they understand of the English they hear, and about how much the pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary di

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verge from the model that they were taught. The reason for this is that, for the most part, learners are exposed to the most prestigious type of English (Standard English, spoken with "received pronunciation", or "RP", commonly known as "the Queen's English"). This variety, far from being universal, has in fact been estimated to be spoken by only about 3% of the population (Trudgill<sup>1)</sup>). To further complicate matters, there is an enormous amount of variation in the way in which the remaining 97% speaks and uses the language. Of course, as would be expected, much of the linguistic variation has a regional basis, but in Britain it is the way that language varies *socially* that is of particular interest.

Britain has long been regarded as a "class-bound", hierarchical society, with all the connotations of privilege and prejudice that such a system entails. Although proponents of the "decline of class" thesis may question the relevance of the concept of social class in today's society, an important recent study of the British class structure (Marshall et al.<sup>2)</sup>) has shown that class identity is still strong. Despite rapid social, political and economic change, most people would agree with sociologist Fiona Devine<sup>3)</sup> that "class remains an important influence on people's life chances, collective identities and socio-political actions". Britain, then, remains very much a class-conscious country. It is also, in comparison with other countries which have English as a first language, a particularly *linguistically* class-conscious country. As sociolinguist Richard Hudson<sup>4)</sup> points out, "one of the characteristics of the hierarchical social structure of a country like Britain is that social class takes precedence over geography as a determinant of speech". RP, for example, unlike prestige forms elsewhere, is a class pronunciation without local associations, whereas it is not until we reach the lower social levels that we find a strong correlation with use of regional dialect varieties. It is, of course, obvious that the way people talk is related somehow to their social status and level of education, and that language is often used in ways which perpetuate social distinctions, advantages, and stigmas. Most people are keenly aware of the relationship between language and class (see Reid<sup>5)</sup> for the results of a survey in which speech is ranked as the top criterion for determining social class). However, it has only been fairly recently that the introduction of quantitative techniques has enabled sociolinguists to gain a deeper understanding of this relationship.

## 1.2 Aims and Scope

This paper reviews some of the sociolinguistic research into the nature of the varieties of English used by different strata of society in Britain. It aims to make clear that such differences are not just of academic interest, by showing how they can increase our understanding of the social structure and by addressing the important attitudinal and educational ramifications of social language variation. Before looking in some detail at differences between RP and other social varieties, we shall first briefly describe the social class structure in Britain. We continue by discussing some commonly held attitudes and prejudices, paying particular attention to how they affect educational, social, and employment opportunities.

## 2 THE BRITISH CLASS STRUCTURE

### 2.1 Defining Class

The resilience of social class means that it occupies an important position in British society. However, although it is a concept readily understood by most people, it is far from easy to define. In this context the term "class" is usually taken to mean the distinct social groupings which, taken as a whole, constitute British society. Sociologists have various ways of constructing models of the class structure based primarily on occupation (e.g. Goldthorpe et al<sup>6)</sup>). Such models can be used to show a clear relationship between class position and various aspects of social behaviour, privilege, and disadvantage. Wealth, working and living conditions, life-styles, political beliefs, and education are all strongly class-based, as is one's life-expectancy (it is still the case that the higher one's class position the longer one lives on average).

Although class definitions are becoming increasingly blurred due to the dynamic changes of modern society, most people still recognize the existence of three main groups of classes: the Upper Class, the Middle Class, and the Working Class. Although this division greatly oversimplifies the social structure, there is usually little difficulty in placing an individual in one of these classes: Reid<sup>5)</sup> cites research which shows that more than 90 percent of British people surveyed recognize the existence of these social classes and see themselves as belonging to one such class. Interestingly, Reid found that subjective class ratings correspond closely to objective scales used by the researchers.

Further distinctions within the classes can be made, for example between professionals and ordinary clerical and administrative ("white-collar") workers in the middle class, and skilled and non-skilled workers in the working class, resulting in upper, middle, and lower sub-groups. However, as Chambers<sup>7)</sup> points out, class has to be seen as a continuum rather than a set of discrete ranks, which means that it will always be difficult to categorize people near the boundaries of the main classes.

### 2.2 The Upper Class

The Upper Class is often known as the "aristocratic" or "landed" class, because its members tend to have noble titles and own a great deal of land. Members of this class are extremely wealthy, with the top one per cent of wealth holders owning one-third of the nation's wealth (Abercrombie et al<sup>8)</sup>). The core of the class consists of those actively involved in the control of large businesses, and many of upper-class origin hold powerful positions in politics, the military, and the courts of law. Networks are very important for the upper class, with ties of friendship, marriage and kinship, similar education (often prestigious fee-paying public schools, Oxford or Cambridge University), as well as business contacts. The upper class is very small, and often undistinguished from the upper-middle class in surveys. It is, nevertheless, an important and distinct class because of its economic, political, and social power.

### 2.3 The Middle Class

Created by the growth in new white-collar occupations since the beginning of the century, this class has seen rapid expansion in the past few decades mainly due to the relentless advance of technology. Members of the middle class range from professional people and high-level management (the service, or upper-middle, class) through to "routine" workers such as clerks and shop assistants. Also included are engineers, farmers, shopkeepers, as well as those with traditional middle-class occupations such as lawyers, doctors, or clergymen. There are considerable differences between the upper and lower-middle classes, with routine workers having a much lower income and far less control over their work.

### 2.4 The Working Class

This is usually defined as the social class to which people belong who are paid wages for manual work. In contrast to the recent proliferation of professional and managerial jobs, the number of workers with manual occupations continues to decline steadily, and many face job insecurity and unemployment. In some respects, especially regarding social life and the degree of authority they have over other workers, manual workers are similar to lower-middle-class workers, but they have little in common with professional and managerial workers in these respects. As with the middle class, the working class can be further sub-divided, with differentiation often being made between skilled and non-skilled workers.

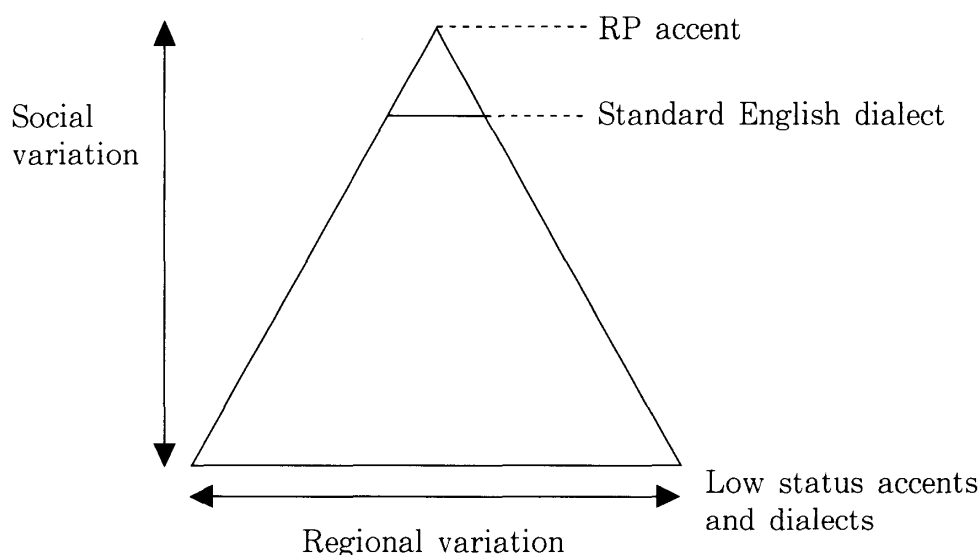
## 3 LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL CLASS

### 3.1 Social Dialect and Accent Variation

In linguistically class-conscious Britain, it is the way that people speak that most readily indicates the class to which they belong. As we mentioned earlier, there is a prestige form, RP, spoken by an elite minority, and there is marked social and regional diversity of other varieties. "The Queen's English" can be traced back to the fourteenth century and a Southern English dialect which, as the accent of the court and the upper classes in London and the surrounding area, came to signify a person's high position in society and to be accepted as the "most correct" way of speaking. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the promotion of this spoken standard at the ancient public schools such as Eton, Harrow, and Rugby resulted in its wider diffusion and acceptance as the prestige form of spoken English.

RP is spoken by those on, or aspiring to, the higher social levels (i.e. the upper and upper-middle classes) and shows very little variation, geographically or otherwise. However, we find more regional variation as we descend the social scale. Moving down through the middle classes, RP gives way to Standard English with minor local dialectal variations, spoken with increasingly regional accents. Go further down still, and we find a high degree of correlation between working class status and use of a localized, non-

standard, variety of English. It is important to point out that, as we found when attempting to draw class boundaries, it is necessary to think in terms of a continuum: social class accents and dialects cannot be considered as being discrete or separate entities. This is clearly shown in the following diagram (after Trudgill<sup>9)</sup>).



We have known for a long time about this kind of social and regional dialect and accent variation, and we have detailed descriptions of RP as well as working-class varieties such as Cockney and Glaswegian. We have not known, however, exactly how RP and the intermediate and most localized accents are related to social class, for example, how far RP extends down the social scale in different places, or exactly what the other accents are like.

In recent years a number of sociolinguistic studies of urban dialects have been undertaken by linguists who have concentrated on obtaining tape-recordings of English as it is actually used and spoken in everyday conversation. In the following section, we shall look at how the results of these surveys have helped to clarify the relationship between social class and linguistic forms.

## 3.2 The Linguistic Features of Different Social Varieties

### 3.2.1 *Received Pronunciation*

RP has been well-described (eg. see Gimson<sup>10)</sup>) and it is often used as a reference norm for the description of other varieties of English. However, as Trudgill and Hannah<sup>11)</sup> point out, although it continues to be socially pre-eminent in Britain, “it has in recent years become less monolithic both phonetically and socially”. Several varieties (and even a generation gap) have been recognized, some of which are described briefly below.

### (1) Conservative and Advanced RP

Gimson<sup>10)</sup> and Wells<sup>12)</sup>, for instance, differentiate between “conservative” RP and “advanced” RP, with conservative pronunciations being typically used by older speakers and advanced pronunciations typical of younger speakers. Algeo<sup>13)</sup> gives an example of this: a conservative type of RP has a triphthong [taɪə] for tyre and pronounces paw, pore, and poor as three different sounds: [pɔ:], [pɔə], [puə]; a more general type of RP has a diphthong [taɪ] for tyre and pronounces both paw and pore as [pɔ:], but poor as [puə]; and the most innovative type of RP has a monophthong [ta:] for tyre and pronounces paw, pore, and poor all alike as [pɔ:].

### (2) Marked and Unmarked RP

Honey<sup>14)</sup> distinguishes between two forms of the accent, which he labels “marked” and “unmarked” RP. Unmarked RP is the mainstream variety, conventionally associated with BBC newsreaders and also with doctors, school teachers, and secretaries. Marked RP is associated with the Royal Family, the aristocracy, and older senior army and naval officers and university teachers at Oxford and Cambridge. Distinctive features of marked RP include the following: the pronunciation [ɔ:] in words like *often*, *cross*, and *cloth*; the tendency to give words like *really* and *rarely* the same pronunciation; and a distinctive articulatory setting which in turn gives its speakers a distinctive “creaky” voice quality.

### (3) Near RP

“Near RP” is described by Algeo<sup>13)</sup> as “an accent without strong regional identity that would generally be regarded as educated, middle-class, and ‘well-spoken’ but would not be regarded as RP by RP speakers.” For Honey<sup>14)</sup>, it is “an accent which is not RP (ie, the unmarked variety) but something between RP and the local accents in which the historic dialects were once spoken.” Trudgill and Hannah<sup>11)</sup> point out that many native speakers working as teachers of English are speakers of near RP. If they are from the south of England, it is likely that their accents will closely resemble RP (especially if they are from a middle-class background), but not be identical to it. Wells<sup>12)</sup> speaks of “Adoptive RP”, which is that learned as an adult rather than a child, and therefore imperfect in some details.

#### 3.2.2 *Local Studies of Nonstandard Features*

The introduction of quantitative methods developed by the American linguist William Labov<sup>15)</sup> has enabled us to make significant advances in the study of social-class dialects and accents. Following Labov’s lead, a number of studies have been carried out in Britain, in which use of a particular linguistic feature, known to vary within the community being studied, is isolated and correlated with social class. Subjects are assigned to social classes using an approach based on that of sociologists such as Goldthorpe, with occupation being the most important indicator. The results of some of these studies are shown below.

(1) Third-Person Singular Forms Without -s

A survey in Norwich carried out by Trudgill<sup>16)</sup> showed clearly the relationship between a grammatical feature (dialect) and social class. In Standard English, the third-person singular form has an *s* which the other forms do not have, and this feature was selected for study. The number of third-person singular present tense forms without *s* were counted, and then expressed as a percentage of all third-person present singular forms. The results for the different social groups were as follows:

% Verbs Without -s

Middle middle class	0
Lower middle class	29
Upper working class	75
Middle working class	81
Lower working class	97

(2) "H" Dropping

Two studies were carried out in Bradford and Norwich (see Chambers and Trudgill<sup>17)</sup>) which investigated the relationship between pronunciation (accent) and social class. The results showed that the percentage of initial *hs* 'dropped' in words like *hammer* and *hat* correlates closely with social class membership. The results are shown in the following table:

% *hs* Dropped

	Bradford	Norwich
Upper middle class	12	6
Lower middle class	28	14
Upper working class	67	40
Middle working class	89	60
Lower working class	93	60

(3) Final Pronunciation of the -ing Suffix

Another survey in Norwich (see Trudgill<sup>16)</sup>) studied the percentage of final *n'* as opposed to *ng* in words such as *walking* and *doing*. Again, a clear relationship between the percentage of *walkin'*-type pronunciations and social class was found:

% *n'*-Type Pronunciations (Non-RP Forms)

Middle middle class	31
Lower middle class	42
Upper working class	87
Middle working class	95
Lower working class	100

#### (4) Glottalization

The pronunciation of *t* between two vowels (as in *butter*) or at the end of a word (as in *but*) is often realized as a *glottal stop* (often represented as *bu'er*) in many parts of Britain. A study made in Glasgow by Macaulay<sup>18)</sup> shows clearly how the glottal stop pronunciation is related to social class:

#### % Glottal Stops Pronounced, Glasgow

Upper middle class	48
Lower middle class	73
Upper working class	84
Lower working class	92

These are only some of the studies which illustrate the correlation between social class and approximation to standard use. Such studies appear to support the division of society into middle and working class groups. Other nonstandard grammatical features found in working-class speech throughout the country have been identified, and some of these are described in the following section.

#### 3.2.3 General Nonstandard Features

Working-class dialects have many nonstandard grammatical features in common, and these similarities override regional differences. A study of school children in Reading carried out by Cheshire<sup>19)</sup> identified several such features. None of these are restricted to the English of Reading; in fact, as Todd and Hancock<sup>20)</sup> point out, there is actually a "standardness" about the nonstandard grammatical features that are found throughout the country (and, indeed, throughout the English-speaking world). Some of the most ubiquitous are noted below:

- (1) Multiple negation: "I didn't go nowhere."
- (2) Subject/verb noncord: "We was the only ones." "I were there yesterday."
- (3) Conjugation regularization: "She done it." "They've went to the cinema."
- (4) *Them* used as a demonstrative: "I've seen them students."
- (5) *Ain't* for *be not* or *have not*: "How come that ain't working?" "You ain't been around there, have you?"
- (6) *Never* for general negation: "I never went to school today."
- (7) Comparison: "She's more better than him." "He's the most toughest."
- (8) Adjective form for adverb use: "They done it very nice."

#### 3.2.4 Vocabulary

Class status in Britain is signalled not only by pronunciation and grammatical use, but also by word choice.

##### (1) 'U' and Non-'U' Usage



In 1954, linguist Alan Ross<sup>21)</sup> published an essay which investigated the nature of upper-class language, prompting what is probably the best-known debate on the English language and social class. Ross looked at the distinctive pronunciation, vocabulary, and written language conventions of upper-class language, and introduced the concepts of 'U' (upper-class usage) and 'Non-U' (all other kinds of usage). Although impressionistic, it was a highly perceptive account which drew attention to a large number of features which signal upper-class status. There have been considerable social changes in Britain since the 1950s, but the terms 'U' and 'Non-U' are still familiar today. The following are some of the distinctions proposed by Ross:

U	non-U
rich	wealthy
sick	ill
writing-paper	note-paper
house	home
spectacles	glasses
table napkin	serviette
have one's bath	take a bath
luncheon	dinner
pudding	sweet

## (2) Slang

Vocabulary usage does not demarcate only upper-class speakers, and it is possible to give hundreds of examples of words and expressions that are used primarily by working-class speakers. Over time, a rich slang has developed in working-class life, creating nicknames, abbreviations, and even rhymed words for all sorts of objects and situations. The best examples can be found in "Cockney", used by Londoners, especially those from the East End of the city. Characteristic Cockney vocabulary includes *dekk* ("look around"), *lolly* ("money"), *doolally* ("demented"), *yob* ("boy"), and *aggro* ("aggression"). "Rhyming slang" is particularly associated with Cockney. For a given word it substitutes a rhyming expression, such as *you and me* for *tea*. Other examples include *trouble and strife* ("wife"), *Would you Adam and Eve it?* ("Would you believe it?"), and *butcher's* (from *butcher's hook* for *look*).

## (3) Lexical Bar

"Lexical bar" refers to the "semantic barrier which exists in the English lexicon that emerges from socio-historical factors and is reinforced by the socio-occupational orderings of contemporary society" (Corson<sup>22)</sup>). Because most of the specialist and high status terminology of English is Graeco-Latin in origin and most of the less abstract terminology is of Anglo-Saxon origin, English has a fairly clear boundary drawn between its everyday and high-status vocabularies. Studies in Yorkshire and London found enormous

differences in use between upper-middle-class and lower-working-class children. Upper-middle-class children were found to reveal great development in their oral and written use of Graeco-Latin words between twelve and fifteen years of age while their working-class peers reveal only a slight developmental change in their *oral* use. It was also found that those choosing Graeco-Latin words are able to achieve higher levels of semantic complexity.

### 3.2.5 *Restricted and Elaborated Codes*

This is an account of the relationship of language to class which, like the lexical bar theory, suggests that members of different social classes may differ in their ability to actually *use* the language. The concepts of "elaborated code" and "restricted code" were introduced by the sociologist Basil Bernstein in the early 1970s. It is claimed that middle-class families have access to an elaborated code, which enables them to be explicit and make fewer assumptions about their listeners' knowledge. Working-class families, on the other hand, are said to promote a less explicit restricted code, with meanings only becoming clear in a local context where values and understandings are shared. However, this has been widely criticized as an overly simplistic view, and we need to bear in mind other factors such as the context where learning takes place and the way that family life is structured.

## 4 ATTITUDES AND PREJUDICES

### 4.1 *Dialect Discrimination*

An unfortunate result of social stratification is that to this day, there are people who harbour feelings of bitterness, anger, or contempt over the gulf between the classes. As we have seen, the way that people speak can be used to place them quite accurately within a particular social class. It is not surprising, then, that speech is an area where prejudice is widespread. There is more than a little truth in playwright George Bernard Shaw's pronouncement that "it is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him". American social scientist Henry Weisser<sup>23</sup> observes that in Britain "speech can bring on painful self-consciousness for some people and deft snobbery on the part of others". Speakers of RP, for instance, although commonly perceived as intelligent (see Section 4.2.1), tend to come across to speakers of local dialects as cold, arrogant, or snobbish. Working-class dialects, on the other hand, are often seen by those aspiring to RP as ugly, lazy, and ungrammatical. Shaw's famous play *Pygmalion* (and the musical based on it, *My Fair Lady*), although generally classed as romantic comedy, is satire commenting on the social attitudes which place such importance on having the "correct" accent. In the play, a Cockney flower girl is taught to pronounce English "like a duchess", and as long as she speaks correctly, she is received in the best social circles. The fact that this type of discrimination continues to be the source of humour (as in much comedy on TV) cannot hide the fact that it is a serious

problem in society today, as we shall see in the following section.

Milroy and Milroy, quoted in Wolfram<sup>24)</sup> have observed that dialect discrimination seems to be tolerated to a far greater degree than any other type: "Although public discrimination on the grounds of race, religion and social class is not now publicly acceptable, it appears that discrimination on linguistic grounds is publicly acceptable, even though linguistic differences may themselves be associated with ethnic, religious and class differences." What is happening is that judgements about "good" and "bad" language are being based on the social connotations of dialects and accents rather than on anything inherent in the linguistic varieties themselves. The fact is that all dialects are equally grammatical and correct; they differ only in their social significance and function. It is no coincidence that the accents characterized as "ugly" are urban accents such as those spoken in Birmingham or Liverpool; it is only because people associate these accents with heavily industrialized areas that they regard them as "harsh" or "unattractive". Americans, however, do not find the speech of these areas ugly, simply because for them, such accents have no social connotations. Trudgill<sup>9)</sup> describes an experiment which shows the way in which attitudes influence perceptions of particular varieties: English speakers were asked to rate three different French accents. It had been found previously that Canadian-French speakers rated educated European French more favourably than educated Canadian French, which in turn was preferred to working-class Canadian-French. The English speakers, on the other hand, rated all three accents the same. It would seem that for them, none had any pleasant or unpleasant connotations.

It is not difficult to find examples of the arbitrary way in which linguistic class markers work. We saw in Section 3.2.2 that the *-in'* variant is typical of much working-class speech today, but a century ago this was a desirable feature of speech in the upper middle class and above, and may still occasionally be heard. Not even RP speakers pronounce the *h* in *hour* or *honour*, so why should it be wrong to say *ouse* rather than *house*? Regarding grammar, multiple negation (*I don't want nothing*) is often considered to be illogical, but is a feature found in French and a number of other languages. Similarly, many people would say that a sentence of the type *He's the most biggest* is ungrammatical, but it was part of the standard dialect in Shakespeare's day (*The most unkindest cut of all*).

Prejudices based on accent or dialect are of course as insidious as any other. Fortunately, along with common sense, we now have a wealth of empirical evidence which shows that no one form is superior to any other. However, for the time being at least, we have to live with a number of social problems resulting from linguistic prejudice, some of which are identified in the following section.

## 4.2 The Consequences of Linguistic and Social Inequality

### 4.2.1 Social / Occupational Restrictions and Expectations

As Chambers<sup>7)</sup> points out, linguistic prejudices have the effect of unfairly limiting an individual's self-fulfilment, partly by restricting occupational and social mobility.

Research (cited in Hughes and Trudgill<sup>2 5)</sup>) has shown that there is still considerable pressure for individuals to modify their speech in the direction of RP if they wish to advance socially. In an experiment carried out in South Wales, a university lecturer gave the same talk to two groups of schoolchildren, but with one group he used RP, and with the other, a Birmingham accent. The children who had heard the lecturer speaking in RP gave him a significantly higher rating of intelligence than those who had heard him use a Birmingham accent. We should not be surprised, then, if an employer prefers to hire an RP speaker rather than a speaker of a stigmatized variety, or if a worker's suggestion is dismissed by a supervisor because of the way it is said. Neither is it surprising to find McCrum *et al*<sup>2 6)</sup> stating that an RP speaker "has a better chance of asserting his rights" in situations where credibility is at a premium, such as when negotiating credit with a bank manager.

People still expect TV newscasters, broadcasters, and politicians (perceived as educated and authoritative) to speak with an accent approximating RP; broadcasters who have non-standard accents have been known to receive "hate-mail". In contrast to the United States, where a number of presidents have spoken with strong regional pronunciations, it is difficult to imagine a British politician carrying non-standard English into high office. A good example of this is former prime-minister Margaret Thatcher: although born into a lower-middle-class Lincolnshire family, by the time she became an MP she had adapted her accent to a marked RP variety, and according to Algeo<sup>1 3)</sup> "has been continually modifying her speech in order to achieve the right mixture of upper-class authority and appealing persuasiveness".

An obvious question is, if RP has such high prestige, and speakers of stigmatized varieties are so disadvantaged, why do such varieties continue to exist? One reason is, as Chambers<sup>7)</sup> points out, that because mobility is the only social force that can eliminate sharp dialect differences in a community, then limiting the social and occupational possibilities of people with non-standard accents guarantees that their accents will endure. Another reason is that working-class, non-standard varieties have a kind of prestige which reflects values which are important to a particular group, and men in particular, such as masculinity and friendliness. This is known as *covert prestige*, because attitudes of this type are not usually overtly expressed, and depart markedly from the mainstream societal values (of schools and other institutions) of which everyone is consciously aware.

#### 4.2.2 Educational Implications

In Britain, nowhere does the question of accent and dialect arouse more distress and bitterness than in the schools. The problem is that there is a conflict between the language of teachers and the school (which places emphasis on the value of Standard English) and the language of many working-class children, who use regional dialects. In many schools, teachers are constantly (and vainly) striving to eradicate features of the local dialect. Such teachers tend to regard regional features as mistakes in standard English, but, as we have seen, this kind of judgement has no basis in fact. Prescriptive

attitudes to correctness have a social rather than linguistic foundation, and can therefore be seen as tantamount to a rejection of the social values of the speaker. The result will be, as Hudson<sup>4)</sup> points out, "either to make the child's image more negative or to strengthen his determination not to conform".

Another problem resulting from teachers' prejudices is the way in which pupils are sometimes assessed. There is evidence, for instance, that teachers base their first impressions of pupils on the way that they speak rather than other sources of information which may appear to be more relevant (see Giles and Powesland<sup>27)</sup>). If this is so, then the child whose speech leads to an unfavourable first impression will be at a considerable disadvantage and under pressure to perform better than other children. Very often prejudice is operating at a sub-conscious level, with reactions to speech being influenced by learnt attitudes, even when at a rational level prescriptive ideologies are rejected. An example of this is found in Macaulay<sup>18)</sup>, in which a college of education lecturer interviewed by Macaulay in Glasgow stated that he had no objection to the local accent, but took exception to "careless speech where they're clipping word endings and drawing out vowels". In fact, the lengthening of certain vowels and glottalization, which is what the lecturer meant by "careless speech", are important components of the Glasgow accent. The perceived distinction between a "local accent" and "careless speech" therefore must have been the result of learnt attitudes, and is completely unjustified.

Dealing with problems of prejudice and prescriptivism in schools is not easy, but the first step is for teachers to recognize the social motives underlying prescriptivism, as well as its social function for maintaining the standard norm. Trudgill offers sensible advice: "We cannot expect teachers, any more than anybody else, to change their attitudes overnight, but teachers can be encouraged to become aware of their own attitudes, to make allowances for them, and to recognize the problems they may cause." This does not mean abandoning the attempt to teach Standard English, and pupils must be made aware of the potential and validity of language variation in social context. Teachers also, as Milroy and Milroy<sup>28)</sup> point out, need to have a clear understanding of the small, but systematic, differences between Standard English and the non-standard dialect of their pupils in order to distinguish between non-standard constructions and "genuine" mistakes.

Bernstein's notions of "restricted" and "elaborated" speech variants suggest that working-class pupils will have problems additional to those caused by non-standard pronunciation and grammar. If it is true that such pupils are more likely to be limited to a restricted code, then we would expect them to have both social and academic problems at school, where the elaborated code is required. The elaborated code is said to reflect the values, communication patterns and learning styles of the middle class. Working-class children, therefore, who favour a different mode of learning and lack a continuity of cultures between home and school, will be disadvantaged. Malmkjaer<sup>29)</sup> believes that such a view invites change in the school as much as in the pupils, and cites *The Wigan Language Project* as one programme designed to bring about just such a reciprocal change. The lexical bar theory, too, implies that in the setting of the school, working-

class pupils are disadvantaged, in this case lexically. Corson<sup>22)</sup> outlines some educational policies, which include changing teachers' perceptions and approaches to language use.

## 5 CONCLUSION

We have confirmed that, although boundaries are blurred, it is possible to distinguish distinct social classes in Britain, and that the class system, for better or worse, is still relevant for the vast majority of people today. Sociolinguistic studies have determined that there are significant correlations between social class background and language, which would imply that we are justified in dividing society in such a way. The highly systematic nature of linguistic variation may provide us with much more reliable information about social stratification, and so to continue with this kind of research will clearly be of benefit to linguists and sociologists alike. It is to be hoped that researchers can further improve their methodology and find a way of better defining that most complex of variables, social class, as well as gaining a more thorough understanding of the interaction between class and other important variables such as age, gender, and level of education.

Our investigation has also provided possible explanations for the marked educational underachievement of working-class children in comparison with their peers, and has shown that any kind of discrimination based on the way an individual speaks is based wholly on social, rather than linguistic, factors. It is to be hoped that teachers, employers, and others in positions of authority will become more aware of their own prejudices. A great many people do not like the class system because of the social barriers it throws up, and greater tolerance of varieties of language different from one's own will surely have the effect of lessening class divisions. We have already seen evidence of some breakdown of the rigid divisions between social classes in the changing nature of RP and greater acceptance of regional varieties. One recent trend, greatly influenced by TV and the media, is the spread of a variety known as "Estuary English", which shares features of both RP and Cockney. The fact that prime-minister Tony Blair has been observed to modify his native RP in the direction of Estuary English is significant in that it shows us that regionally-modified speech is no longer as stigmatized as it once was. Even the Royal Family is not immune to change, with glottalization being observed in the speech of some of the younger members. Perhaps one day even the Queen will no longer speak the Queen's English!

We cannot foresee the future, although it is probable that the influence of RP will further decline with the increasing importance of world varieties of English. What we can be sure of, however, is that as language in Britain changes and evolves, it will continue to reflect the diversity of its people and their values, loyalties, and aspirations.

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