

A Sociolinguistic Approach to *Pygmalion*: Eliza's Bidialectalism

Madisyn Beilowitz

Faculty Introduction

Dr. Helena Halmari

Madisyn Beilowitz's article, entitled "A Sociolinguistic Approach to *Pygmalion*: Eliza's Bidialectalism," is a study of dialect variation in the language of Eliza Doolittle in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Beilowitz looks at Eliza's loss of identity as she becomes bidialectal, shedding her Cockney accent in favor of Received Pronunciation (RP). While Shaw's play is widely known and studies of both RP and Cockney abound, to my knowledge, Beilowitz is the first to analyze the play from a sociolinguistic viewpoint. Developing a methodology which tackles the identification of the two dialects in Eliza's language repertoire, Beilowitz shows convincingly how learning a new accent is only part of bidialectal identity. Through its novel methodology and detailed analysis of the interplay of language, class, and identity, Beilowitz adds a valuable contribution to the current state of research in the sociolinguistic analysis of literature.

Abstract

This project focuses on Eliza Doolittle's language in George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, originally published in 1912. My objective is to describe and analyze the linguistic features of Eliza's shift in speech from a low-prestige accent (Cockney) to the high-prestige Received Pronunciation (RP) and to discuss how and why this shift, in the context of Eliza's sociolinguistic circumstances, distances her from both upper- and lower-class social groups. The research methods are those used in historical sociolinguistics and linguistic corpus studies. This study's hypothesis is that Eliza is never able to fully assimilate into upper-class society because of her monetary and educational background. After undergoing phonetic lessons taught by Professor Higgins, she is also separated from the lower class she was born into. It is also hypothesized that Eliza relies on facets of the Cockney dialect when distressed, and that this blend of RP and Cockney highlights Eliza's bidialectalism as the root of her separation from both classes within the society of the time.

The Cockney dialect has experienced a great rise and fall throughout the history of England. Cockney began as the common form of speech for Londoners, accepted and used by the majority of the city's population; however, it became discredited after the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) labeled it as vulgar in the 1920s. Harry Morgan Ayres, late professor of English Literature at Columbia University, delves into historical research in his review of *Cockney and Received Pronunciation* (RP) that illuminates the ties between RP—associated with Standard British English—and the Cockney accent during the refinement of “London Speech” that aimed to designate the Cockney accent as vulgar. Ayres points out that Cockney was villainized primarily because “it is so like the standard speech that it sounds like a parody of it” (127-128). The creation of RP hinged on the borrowing and bastardization of low-prestige dialects. The stigmas it created for any localized dialect, more specifically Cockney, were with the intent of widening the class divide in Britain. RP’s blatant cherry-picking of speech when establishing its norms shows the otherization of the Cockney dialect was not based on the dialect’s perceived vulgarity but on the perceived vulgarity of the lower class that inherited it.

The complete history of the Cockney dialect is cataloged in William Matthews’ book *Cockney Past and Present*.¹ Matthews, creator of the study Ayres discusses, notes that Cockney “has been by far the most important of all non-standard forms of English for its influence upon accepted speech” (232). This shows the Cockney accent refused to be stamped out, and often parts of the accent bled into parts of RP. In sixteenth-century London, Cockney was deemed the model for accepted speech. However, once the creation of standardized speech was put in motion by the BBC and upper classes, Cockney was scapegoated as a form of language error that RP could be measured against. Historically, Cockney was once considered to be the norm of accepted speech and often taught in schools because of its practical use for the masses. Just because upper-class society deigned Cockney to be vulgar during the rise of RP, the stigmatization of Cockney did not wipe out the speakers

¹ The term *dialect* refers to a language variety that is associated with a group of language users. For instance, Cockney as a dialect refers to the language variety spoken by some members of the East London working class. The term *accent*, on the other hand, refers to the pronunciation features of a dialect, excluding grammar and lexicon. (See, e.g., Wardhaugh and Fuller 40-42).

of the Cockney dialect. Even today, snippets of Cockney still linger in modern London dialects.

A Received Pronunciation, or BBC English: An Overview

Received Pronunciation was part and parcel to the BBC's creation of a standardized form of language. The BBC formed an Advisory Committee on Spoken English, which spanned from the mid-1920s to the late 1930s. The Committee aimed to standardize the pronunciation of the English language to create consistency across differing broadcasters on air. Soon after the Committee's creation, it began to set the standard for what was considered "proper English" for the masses. Consequently, this standard created a stigma against linguistic variation—accents and dialects that did not follow the newly prescribed, standard pronunciation. Lynda Mugglestone, linguist and professor of the History of English at the University of Oxford, speaks of the connection between the linguistic change in Britain and the rise of the BBC's promotion of RP in her article "Spoken English and the BBC" (2008). Mugglestone highlights that the popular rhetoric regarding RP and Cockney is based on assumptions about class, education, and culture. This rhetoric often relies on the otherization of low-class groups to uphold the overt prestige for RP. Mugglestone also notes that George Bernard Shaw eventually became "a member of the BBC Committee on Spoken English," which spurred the creation of his play *Pygmalion* (200). Localized dialects, such as Cockney, are often aimed to be wiped

out from broadcasting and schools. This often leads to a situation where the only representations of localized speech are comedic

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elements in broadcast programming. The Committee's inherent biases and disparaging representations toward localized speech allowed the BBC to become a "catalyst for linguistic change" (212). The Committee's power for influencing the ideology about dialects reinforced society's idolization of RP and consequently vulgarized forms of non-standard speech, including Cockney.

Jürg Rainer Schwyter, a scholar of socio- and historical linguistics, delves into this history of the BBC's Advisory Committee on Spoken English in his article "Setting a Standard: Early BBC Language Policy and the Advisory Committee on Spoken English." Originally, RP was negatively

received before the BBC's revamping of a standardized speech during the 1920s. During this standardization, society believed there was no accent associated with RP. However, RP is inherently an accent on its own, and it had a propensity to relabel words borrowed from other languages as properly British. Regarding this relabeling, Schwyter refers to a statement in the BBC Advisory Committee's files that when a foreign word has "lived long enough" among the British public and undergone a sort of "naturalisation," the word has been "Englished" (230). The BBC's main failure was caused by its dismissal of the fact that there was a distinct—and normal—variation across age and class that would alter the prescribed pronunciations. In addition to these variations of speech, only select people used RP, and most of the population was disinterested in altering their speech (see, e.g., Wardhaugh & Fuller 40).

Shaw's disapproval of the BBC Committee is shown in BBC-affiliated director, producer, and writer Vivian Ducat's article "Bernard Shaw and The King's English," which covers the time Shaw was a member of the BBC Committee. Shaw found fault in the ideology of naturalization and the BBC's rulings over the standardization of language. Ducat notes that Shaw often carried a pocket journal containing a list of BBC telecasters' deviating or inconsistent pronunciations which had been broadcast on the BBC. Shaw often stood for the common man during his time at the BBC, most notably when regarding the word *canine*. Shaw voiced that, despite the BBC's phonetic ruling, it should be pronounced *cay-nine* instead of *cab-nine* because of the way it was pronounced by professionals in the dental industry. Shaw resigned from his position following the BBC Committee's rejections of his protests for inclusivity regarding age and class. Soon after Shaw's resignation in 1937, a war against Standard English began. The regional press believed the BBC

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was attempting to destroy Britain's diversity in speech and deemed the Committee's existence frivolous during the heightening tensions of WWII. This criticism directed against the Advisory Committee ignited the eventual downfall of standard speech, the notion of one idealized speech form. In 1939, the Committee was forced to be disbanded.

Eliza Doolittle: Social Identity and Bidialectalism

While Eliza's shift in social identity has been extensively researched, bidialectalism as a substantial factor of her social identity has largely been overlooked. Lovisa Moberg-Berlin's (2020) study "The Cockney Accent: How an Accent Can Represent Social Identity" explores the prejudices that surround the Cockney accent. Accents have the ability to provide information about an individual's social background and can in turn affect the perception of an individual. RP has been the dominant prestige accent since the rise of the BBC promoting the ideology of a universal and standardized speech. The adoption of RP within upper-class society creates a natural consequence of labeling individuals who use forms of localized speech as lower class. With this concept of class distinction and speech, Moberg-Berlin focuses on the Cockney accent's tendency to use slang. She aligns it with the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of slang as being "below the level of standard educated speech" (10). The most compelling argument that Moberg-Berlin provides regarding slang is its societal use as a linguistic concept that distinguishes groups. Moberg-Berlin claims that some of the primary uses of slang and accent in the construction and maintenance of groups are to "identify as a member," "to fit in," or to "identify hierarchies" within groups as part of identity assimilation and identity hierarchies. However, there is an additional aspect of an individual being cast out or included into another group, as slang and accents are used to "win entry to the in-group" or to "exclude someone" from the group (Moberg-Berlin 15-16). This is seen in *Pygmalion* during Eliza's acquisition of RP. Eliza's desire to identify as a member of the in-group is fueled by the connection of RP to overt prestige and causes her eventual disconnection from both RP and Cockney social groups. This disconnect indicates Eliza's inability to fit into either rung on the hierarchical scale because in-group membership is a two-way street and requires acceptance as well as willingness to join. Eliza's disconnect excludes her from both the upper class that embraces the overly prestigious RP, and the Cockney speakers and their accents that carry covert, in-group prestige.

The prejudices surrounding accents are seen within Arthur E. Clery's (1921) article "Accents: Dublin and Otherwise." Clery, an Irish nationalist and university professor, suggests accent is something often used to perpetuate class distinctions. He places accent at a high rank

when diagnosing social standing, believing physical markers (such as outer appearance) are only slightly above the mark an accent makes on identity. Clery believes within this ranking system, differences in social behaviors fall well below accents in determining social positions. These rankings are paralleled in *Pygmalion* when, even in instances where Eliza combines RP with Cockney expressions, she is still able to pass as a member of the upper class because of her newly acquired speech.

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Clery affirms accent is the “natural that neither schoolmaster nor anyone else can expel with a rod,” and natural accent “is the accent in which a man speaks when you stick a pin in him” (547). However, one failing on Clery’s part is in assuming that Eliza acquired perfection in an accent other than her own. Though Eliza is able to pass for a higher class than she was born into, it is often seen in Shaw’s play that Eliza shifts back into her Cockney dialect when she is distressed. This ultimately negates Clery’s notion of Eliza’s perfection in RP and lends more towards Cockney remaining at the core of her identity.

Norbert F. O’Donnell’s (1955) article “On the ‘Unpleasantness’ of ‘Pygmalion’” focuses primarily on the use of affection as a bargaining piece between Eliza Doolittle and Professor Higgins. However, O’Donnell notes that after Eliza’s transformation of speech she is thrust into a social role of a “woman who has genteel manners without the money to maintain herself in a genteel setting” (8). Eliza’s economic standing furthers her distance from both upper- and lower-class society because, even though she can replicate RP, she cannot replicate the wealth or education that would have been included with an upper-class upbringing. This new knowledge of genteel manners subsequently distances her from the social group she first belonged to. O’Donnell emphasizes how Eliza’s “anger gives her purpose” (9). As discussed in Clery’s “Accents: Dublin and Otherwise,” a natural accent arises when the speaker is enveloped in emotion. These two concepts, when paired together, form the theory that Eliza’s natural accent gives her purpose, and any attempts to take her natural accent away are covert methods of taking away her true purpose, or identity, within society.

This separation is seen in Larry D. Bouchard’s (2008) article “Eliza and Rita, Paul, and Luke: The Eclipse and Kenosis of Integrity in *Pygmalion*, *Educating Rita*, and *Six Degrees of Separation*,” which focuses

on the separation of the individual from accent. Bouchard notes that the ideology that standardized speech would help to address societal inequalities runs throughout *Pygmalion*. However, Bouchard states irregularity in speech is what inherently distinguishes individuals, and Higgins' phonetic lessons obscure Eliza's individuality. Additionally, referring to the end of the play—when the phonetic lessons have been completed and Higgins believes Eliza has undergone a complete transformation that would allow for her assimilation with those of RP status—Bouchard points out Eliza is hovering between being Cockney and being of an unknown status. Regardless of whether Eliza chooses to speak Cockney or RP, after becoming bidialectal she has no true voice of her own. This revelation underscores that the issue of Eliza's social identity throughout *Pygmalion* is attributed to her newly acquired bidialectalism.

Higgins' phonetic lessons are equitable to a colonization of language. Awam Amkpa (1999) discusses language colonization in his article "Drama and the Languages of Postcolonial Desire: Bernard Shaw's 'Pygmalion'." Amkpa highlights *Pygmalion*'s historical context as being based on the "bourgeois morality and political values," and the consequence of those values is the creation of a "hegemony that is fundamentally colonial" (295). This colonial hegemony's rejection of those who do not conform to the dominant culture allows upper classes to gain subjectivity of lower-class individuals by placing more restrictions on class mobility. This rejection is prominent in Eliza's shift in language skills as she is assimilated by Higgins' lessons in phonetics, but her assimilation alone does not allow her into the in-group.

The bourgeois' use of language as the fuel to assimilate low-prestige

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speakers into dominant culture is a key factor in how Eliza's rejection from both the upper and lower classes transpires. Even though Higgins has deemed her to have assimilated into the RP-using circles, it is not enough to grant her full acceptance into upper-class society. Eliza is rejected largely because she still uses the colloquialisms from the Cockney dialect that do not align with the bourgeois morality of speech within upper-class British society.

This stance of Eliza being caught between her Cockney identity and something unknown is also discussed in Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen's (1992) "Reading Literacy Narratives." Eldred and Mortensen

focus on both Eliza's dilemma of being between old and new, as well as the tragedy of her phonetic lessons providing faux freedom and class mobility. While Eldred and Mortensen speak mainly about how Eliza's identity is influenced by the aspect of gaining literacy, most of their arguments can also be placed into the realm of sociolinguistics. This shift in Eldred and Mortensen's article from literacy to sociolinguistics shows a clear line between a social hierarchy based on an individual's education and a hierarchy based on the perceived intellect of speakers of low-prestige dialects. Based on this, it can be interpreted that Eliza's acquisition of bidialectalism is closely tied to both an individual and a societal concept of identity.

This societal concept of identity is furthered by Lynda Mugglestone's (1993) belief that pronunciation is no longer considered a small marker of one's identity, but is instead "the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul" (366). Regarding *Pygmalion*, this concept shows

...pronunciation is..."the deepest gulf that separates class from class and soul from soul."

the separation between Eliza's and Higgins' social standings is primarily, if not only, based on Eliza's social rejection, caused by her divergence

from RP. This reference to the societal divide between Cockney and RP furthers Eliza's distancing from both the upper and lower classes upon becoming bidialectal. Mugglestone also points out Shaw's use of accent as one of the sole "determiners of [Eliza's] identity" and acceptance into upper-class society (378). By creating a dichotomy in Eliza's speech, Shaw shows Eliza's downfall is her difficulty in understanding the social significance and prestige connected with RP. Eliza's inability to purge herself of Cockney or understand the societal mannerisms associated with RP leaves her deserted in the gulf of class separation with no means to find footing on the solid ground of either side.

The downfall surrounding Eliza's lack of upper-class mannerisms can be explained through Richard W. Bailey's (2005) "Review of Talking Proper: The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol," which is a review of Mugglestone's (1995) book *Talking Proper*. Although Bailey's content is predominately unrelated to Shaw's *Pygmalion*, he illuminates the key point of Eliza's dilemma of bidialectalism as the difference between class and rank. Bailey notes that ranks "[indicate] the social stratum into which one was born" and consequently their "linguistic habits would be typical of that rank" (269). Eliza's physical markers of working class

include her clothes and lack of hygiene. These physical markers, coupled with her low-prestige Cockney accent and unfavorable mannerisms, such as her bluntness in speech and fits of howling, place Eliza's rank in the lower class. Based on Bailey's theory, it can be said that Eliza's rank is unchangeable—even if she has all the phonetics lessons Higgins has to offer. However, class theoretically allows for social mobility. This mobility usually involves a change in speech. Eliza is shown throughout the play to become remarkably adept at RP, and she is often accepted by those in upper-class social circles because of this shift in speech. This concept of a distinct difference between class and rank helps break down why Eliza's separation from both classes occurs because of her bidialectalism. Though it is possible for her to have upward mobility in class, she will never be able to break free from her societal rank or extinguish her natural accent.

Vicki R. Kennell (2005) adds to the conversation about rank in her article “*Pygmalion* as Narrative Bridge between the Centuries.” Kennell underscores that “social identity, class, education, manners, socioeconomic background, [and] accent” are all markers of Eliza's identity (75). Taking this into account, the important issue of Eliza's rise in class standing, when she does not have the financial standing or rank, is sustaining an upper-class lifestyle. This potential for Eliza's socioeconomic standing hindering her upward mobility in class furthers the divide she has between both social classes and her inability to bridge that gap, even with her newly acquired RP. Kennell explains that Higgins' phonetic lessons are at odds with Eliza's economic background, and that her identity does not rely on her phonetic lessons. Instead, her identity relies on factors of both her class and rank. When Eliza's lack of formal education, upper-class mannerisms, and wealth are combined, they create a massive part of Eliza's identity that outweighs any change in her speech that occurs in the play.

A Brief History of Phonetic Lessons

Henry Higgins' phonetic lessons in *Pygmalion* show a clear resemblance to Alexander Melville Bell's Visible Speech, a system created to represent speech sounds with symbols. Emmott and Beer (2017) explore this connection in their article “Performing Phonographic Physiology.” Emmott and Beer begin by explaining Bell's ideology of a universal and uniform language that could be replicated via the use of a “universal

alphabet” (127). Shaw’s play is a satirical commentary of the phonetic culture of the time and a direct commentary on the agenda of Visible Speech. There is a parallel of Higgins’ methods of teaching phonetics in his occupation and the methods of Visible Speech, where sounds are recorded for the aim of enumerating and symbolizing both linguistic and nonlinguistic sounds produced by the human voice in a method of “physiological recording and replay” (Emmott and Beer, 133). There is an additional parallel to the result of Eliza’s teachings by Higgins and the teachings of Visible Speech by Bell, who aimed to have his students become almost mechanical in their reproduction of sound to the point where they were unable to notice they had formed a word. In a direct reflection of Bell’s sentiment, Higgins expresses that, by the end of her phonetic lessons, Eliza should be able to repeat every sound that could be produced by a human being.

Data and Methodology

This study’s data collection was restricted to Acts 3-5 in *Pygmalion*, focusing on Eliza’s speech after her phonetic lessons, and were comprised of two categories: Eliza’s use of RP and her use of Cockney. Altogether, 119 speaking turns of Eliza were included. Figure 1 was created to indicate the presence of informal speech that shows a blend of both RP and Cockney in some of her speaking parts. Each speaking role, designated with “Eliza:” was placed onto a spectrum chart based on each speaking part’s weighted classification of Cockney or RP.

A rigid categorization of speaking parts would be impossible to create because of the inherent fluidity of language as it is depicted in social contexts in Shaw’s play. In addition to dialect variation (e.g., Standard British English vs. Cockney), language also varies from situation to situation. This variation is called register variation (see, e.g., Wardhaugh & Fuller 52). Bidialectal speakers can use the features of their dialects as situational—that is, register—markers in those speech situations that allow for such a blend of dialects. This is what Eliza also does: she draws register markers from both Standard British English and Cockney. Indeed, much of *Pygmalion*’s humor is created by Eliza’s bidialectal uses within situations where she is expected to use only Standard British English. Non-standard dialects, such as Cockney, typically coincide with Standard English informal registers, but Eliza uses Cockney markers in formal, upper-class settings. Her accent may be RP, but with mixed-in grammatical or lexical elements from Cockney.

To take this complexity into account, the method of spectrum placement, or the utilization of varying weights rather than the limitation to a specific set value, was used to categorize each speaking part either as Standard English, Cockney, or a mixture. RP features on this spectrum were designated with positive integers and Cockney markers were designated with negative integers. Each speaking role was placed into a spreadsheet and designated with a reflected weight of each dialect's presence based on the level of Eliza's social awareness, display of RP or Cockney features, use of lower- or upper-class word choice, and the occasional use of Cockney-specific linguistic mannerisms. The weight of each of these parameters was set to fall within a point system that ranged from 0 to 3. Eliza's presence of emotion, based on the context of the intensity of the social situation she was in, was included as a separate category and indicated by either a Y for yes or N for no. The weighted data were then formulated into a summary pivot that was used to create the spectrum chart shown in Figure 1. The presence of emotion was included by indicating which speaking roles on the spectrum chart featured intense emotion by color coding orange for "yes" and blue for "no," which is shown in the spectrum chart in Figure 2.

The parameters of each speaking part's weight were based on Eliza's social awareness or lack of awareness. This was determined by (1) whether her level of adherence to RP in her conversations aligned with the social situation she was in (that is, RP is expected in formal situations) by analyzing the social reactions of her audience or speaking partner; (2) whether her speech grammatically aligned with the standard of RP or the localized grammar of Cockney, (3) if she used lower or upper-class lexicon, and (4) occasional additional weight if a non-pronunciation feature of Cockney such as rhyming slang (see, e.g., Smith) or a Cockney specific emphatic modifier was present (see figure 1 next page).

Data Analysis

The figure below shows each of Eliza's speaking parts numerically, ranging from 1 to 119 based on where it occurred in the timeline of the play and weighted by whether the speaking part is more closely aligned with Cockney or RP and Standard British English. The speaking parts aligned with Cockney are set below the horizontal axis (negative weight); if aligned with RP, the speaking part is set above the horizontal axis (positive weight).

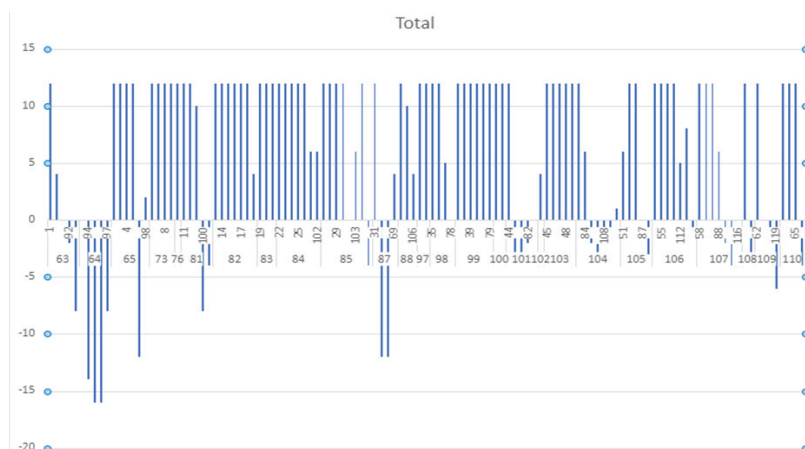


Figure 1. RP and Cockney in Eliza's Speech

The lexical differences that aligned with the upper-class dialect can be seen in the comparison of Eliza's speaking parts in examples (1a) and (1b). In (1a), Eliza uses the Standard English lexical item *before*, whereas in (1b), she uses the Cockney pronunciation *afore*:

(1)

a. Eliza: Before you go, sir— (*Pygmalion* 84)

b. Eliza: I ain't dirty: I washed my face and hands afore I come, I did. (*Pygmalion* 31).

Example (1a) is included in Figure 1, as it occurs beyond Act 3, and is reflected in speaking part 25 that has a positive weight indicating its relationship to RP. While (1b) is not reflected in Figure 1 (it occurs in Act 2, which is beyond the scope of this study because Eliza exhibits mostly Cockney markers before her phonetics lessons commence), this speaking part was important in creating the lexical distinctions in *Pygmalion* that set features of RP and Cockney apart from each other. Note that example (1b) also shows markers of Cockney morphology and grammar: *ain't* for the Standard *am not*; *come* for *came*; and *I did* as an emphatic tag at the end of the utterance.

The localized grammar of the Cockney variant shows also in Eliza's question in example (2):

(2) Eliza: What was you laughing at? (*Pygmalion*, 64)

This question depicts a non-standard use of the past tense form of the auxiliary verb *be*: *was*, instead of the Standard English *were*.

Because bidialectalism is not binary, some allowances were made during categorization. An example of this allowance is in Shaw’s omission of apostrophes. A clear instance of Eliza’s usage of RP displaying emotion is seen in example (3):

(3) Eliza: Ive won your bet for you, havnt I? (*Pygmalion* 81)

Example (3) could possibly be an indicator of more informal speech; however, Shaw’s omission of the apostrophes is also seen in Henry Higgins’ friend’s Colonel Pickering’s speech of “I havnt taken half of it in” when in conversation with Higgins (*Pygmalion* 81). Because of irregularities, apostrophe omission was disregarded as a categorical parameter.

Once all speaking parts were weighted as Cockney, RP, or a blend of both, an evaluation for the presence of indicators of intense emotion was carried out for each speaking part. These emotional indicators included the use of words depicting capitalization throughout, such as *YOUR*, exclamation marks, and the context of the conversations.

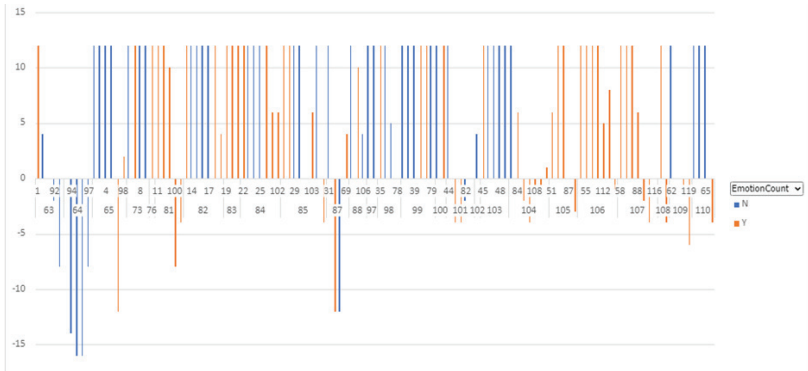


Figure 2. Emotions in Eliza’s Speech

The speaking parts in Figure 2 are indicated with either orange for display of emotion, *Y*; or, blue for no display of emotion, *N*.

Discussion

Eliza’s social awareness is typically signaled by the level of adherence to Standard English usage in her conversations based on both the context

of her speech and the social reactions by her audience or speaking partner. An example of her lack of social awareness can be seen during Mrs. Higgins' social gathering when Eliza explains that her "aunt died of influenza: so, they said" (*Pygmalion* 63). While Eliza's speech follows characteristics of the RP dialect, the setting in which it took place was of high society; bringing up the topic of a dead aunt was not something that regularly occurred in those social circles. As it continues, Eliza's story increases in informality, depicting her use of lower-class language:

(4) Eliza: Y-e-e-e-es, Lord love you! Why should she die of influenza? She come through diphtheria right enough the year before. I saw her with my own eyes. Fairly blue with it, she was. They all thought she was dead; but my father he kept ladling gin down her throat til she came to so sudden that she bit the bowl off the spoon. (*Pygmalion* 63)

Eliza's reliance on her Cockney dialect's grammatical structure can be seen in her emphasizing end tag *she was* and in the phrase *bit the bowl off the spoon*, even though she is using an RP accent (*Pygmalion* 63). Eliza's elaboration of her story also results in the discomfort of those in affluent society who surround her. This discomfort indicates that she is not aware of the social cues in a high-society setting. The upper-class dialect consists of more than merely the pronunciation; the speaker must be aware of the class-specific unwritten rules of linguistic politeness, which include sensitivity to which topics are appropriate to address in formal, upper-class settings.

Eliza's Cockney accent is also shown in her tendency to use Cockney rhyming slang (see, e.g., Smith) and alliteration. When Eliza is arguing with Higgins about what she would do as a profession if she left the comforts of his financial care, Eliza claims she would offer herself "as an assistant to that hairyfaced Hungarian" in reference to Higgins' previous pupil Nepommuck (*Pygmalion* 109). This variance of speech indicates a blend of RP and Cockney, signaling a more informal variation when compared to RP as well as a formal separation from her original Cockney dialect. Eliza carefully articulates the initial alliterating *h* sounds (*hairy Hungarian*), but the phrase itself, being somewhat pejorative, would be considered to belong to a "proper" upper-class register.

Eliza's blend of speech can also be seen in the following example:

(5) Eliza [with perfectly elegant diction]: Walk! Not bloody likely. I am going in a taxi. (*Pygmalion* 65)

While this speaking part was designated by Shaw to be spoken with perfect diction, it features the expletive *bloody*, which is a common emphatic modifier used in Cockney and a feature of informal registers across the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

In some instances, Eliza's dialect mixture in her speech is self-corrected, as shown in example (6):

(6) Eliza: I want a little kindness. I know I'm a common ignorant girl, and you a book-learned gentleman; but I'm not dirt under your feet. What I done [correcting herself] what I did was not for the dresses and the taxis: I did it because we were pleasant together and I come—came—to care for you; not to want you to make love to me, and not forgetting the difference between us, but more friendly like. (*Pygmalion* 107)

Eliza's self-corrections of grammar in example (6) (*I done* > *I did*; *come* > *came*) not only show her tendency to blend markers of Cockney with RP, but also indicate that she is aware of the differing qualities of class, rank, and linguistic properties to each variety of speech.

At some points throughout the play, the parameters of language choice, grammatical structure, and social awareness are not the sole determiners for a speaking part's RP or Cockney weight (see figure 1). An example of this difficulty is shown in example (7):

(7) Eliza: I don't think dad would allow me. Would you, dad? (*Pygmalion* 102)

In example (7), both Eliza's pronunciation and grammar align with RP, and the context does not determine this piece of dialogue to be situationally improper. However, I have identified her language as Cockney because, when contrasted with Eliza's previous use of *father* in the play, *dad* aligns more closely with lower-class language.

Example (7) shows the inevitable challenges in categorizing certain speech parts. It also stands as a reminder of a certain level of arbitrariness often present in scholarly analyses.

Figure 1 shows an undeniable depiction of Eliza's bidialectalism that often emerges in the language by users of newly acquired language varieties.

Cockney Markers as Indicators of Eliza's Emotions

Although RP has taken over more than half of her speaking parts, Figure 2 reflects a higher ratio of emotional display in Eliza's use of Cockney in comparison to her display of emotion in RP.

Eliza's speaking parts that fall closer to neutral or indicate a blend of both dialects show an overwhelming display of emotion. This indicates that Eliza tends to use markers of the Cockney dialect when she experiences heightened emotion. An example of RP's decreased tendency toward emotion is when Eliza is leaving Mrs. Higgins' social gathering and announces her departure with the following declaration:

(8) Eliza: Well: I must go. So please to have met you. Goodbye.
(*Pygmalion* 65)

This prototypical RP phrase shows that Eliza's speech in RP often consists of formulaic phrases and stock expressions that she has acquired as if via rote learning—a practice common in Bell's Visible Speech. It is also interesting to note Shaw's hint of Eliza's use of Standard English as her second dialect: Shaw spells the standard *pleased to* as *please to*. While there is no difference in pronunciation, the missing participle suffix in *please to* is a subtle reminder that Eliza might not have sounded fully upper class despite her learned upper-class phonology. During her conversations with upper-class speakers, Eliza often relies on small talk or phatic communion—light conversation about neutral topics such as weather—to carry the weight of her participation. This is seen in multiple speaking parts throughout the play, as shown by Eliza's turns in examples (9a-c):

- (9)
- a. Whatever are you doing here?
 - b. How do you do...Are you quite well?
 - c. Quite chilly this morning, isn't it? (*Pygmalion* 87-97)

Sometimes, emotion is seen in Eliza's standard dialect such as in example (10):

(10) Eliza: you want me back only to pick up your slippers
and put up with your tempers and fetch and carry for you.
(*Pygmalion* 103)

This comment by Eliza, addressed to Higgins and likening herself to his dog, occurs after Eliza has been dehumanized by him; Higgins sees her as nothing more than a trophy yielding to his every whim even after being accepted by the RP-speaking upper class during the ambassador's in-group garden party. Example (11) of Eliza's language illustrates her strong emotions in the aftermath of Higgins' experimentation of her language:

(11) You don't care. I know you don't care. You wouldn't care
if I was dead. I'm nothing to you—not so much as them
slippers. (*Pygmalion* 81)

In example (11), Eliza's non-standard subjunctive (*if I was*, instead of the standard *if I were*) and her use of *them* (*them slippers*) in place of *those* and in combination with the Cockney's feature of repetition indicate that Eliza is experiencing high emotion on the recurring topic of her perception of Higgins' appreciation of her as a human being. When accounting for the emotional factor, this study's data show that Eliza more often than not falls into the comfort of Cockney, her first dialect, when she experiences emotion.

Conclusion

In *Pygmalion*, there is an immediate and direct consequence to Eliza's transformation in speech as Higgins states that Eliza truly has "no right to be anywhere" (*Pygmalion* 20). Even after learning how to speak in an upper-class accent, Eliza still feels she does not belong in an upper-class life. Eliza also recognizes she cannot easily transition back to a lower-class life after learning how to speak "more genteel" (*Pygmalion* 29). This aspect of Eliza's self-awareness of her linguistic social separation is shown when she alludes her situation to that of a dream: if Higgins should wake her, she "shall forget everything and talk as [she] used to in Drury Lane" (*Pygmalion* 73). On the other hand, even with the awareness of her situation and her mastery of the phonetics of RP that index her membership in the upper class, Eliza is lost without the social background of an upper-class upbringing. While her cultural and social knowledge suit the lower class, the reduction of her Cockney dialect

and exposure to genteel manners sever her ties to her past social group and ostracize her from belonging to her previous life. By the end of the play, Eliza's internal conflict—having been molded to be too “proper” to belong in a lower social class while simultaneously being too low-born to be accepted in an upper social class—underscores her position of bidialectal social isolation. Eliza confirms this isolation when she admits that even though she has tried her best, nothing could “make her the same” as those in the upper class (*Pygmalion* 76).

In this article, I hope to have been able to show the importance of including sociolinguistics and language variation theory in literary analysis. While sociolinguistics has largely been a field focused on spoken language, written language often reflects what authors such as George Bernard Shaw have noticed in the society and time in which they lived. This aspect of literature provides a massive amount of material for the fields of sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, and stylistics, or the linguistic analysis of literature. My study is a direct contribution to Shaw's literary heritage and specifically to the study of *Pygmalion*. More generally, it also contributes to the literary study of drama. While it is impossible to bring back the speakers from decades and centuries past, many of their written works—or fictional depictions of how people may have spoken—have survived to the present. These works also reflect not only language variation in the past, in different places, and by speakers whose language is rarely documented, but also society's perception over which variation fits the standard. This is seen in Eliza's bidialectal social isolation from the upper-class social circles, rooted in her tendency to return to the markers of the Cockney dialect when she is emotionally overwhelmed. Eliza's distancing from the lower class that she once comfortably belonged to stems from her frequency of RP use that overtook more than half of her speaking parts. These factors of her bidialectalism cause Eliza to realize that even if she does her best “nothing can make [her] the same as” those around her (*Pygmalion* 76). Eliza's bidialectalism is the root of her separation from both upper and lower classes within British society. ■

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Student Biography

Madisyn Beilowitz is a senior majored in English at Sam Houston State University. She was a member of Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society and served on the College of Humanities and Social Sciences Student Advisory Board as Secretary during her senior year. When Madisyn decided to enter the Academic Distinction Program, she was interested in widening her knowledge in sociolinguistics. With the mentorship of Dr. Halmari, Madisyn wanted to find a connection to sociolinguistics and literature and was inspired to explore the topic of bidialectalism within George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*. Madisyn Beilowitz graduated in summer 2023 and plans to pursue graduate studies in her home state of Massachusetts to continue her research of finding connections between the worlds of linguistics and literature.