

## STANDARD BRITISH ENGLISH AND COCKNEY. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF COCKNEY

### *1. Standard English*

Standard (British) English and Cockney are the varieties of English. Standard English (SE) is that dialect of English, the grammar, syntax, vocabulary, slang, morphology of which are widely understood and accepted both socially and geographically and is generally considered prestigious. It is worth of mentioning that the “chief difference between standard and non- standard varieties are not in their ‘superior’ or ‘inferior’ linguistic structures, but in the different level of social acceptability accorded to them and in the fact that non-standard varieties are not extensively codified or officially prescribed” (Milroy&Milroy.1993). In this work we refer to Standard British English, leaving out other possible standards (Standard American English, Standard Australian English, Standard Irish English etc.) A standard language is a language one of whose varieties has undergone standardization. Standardization is a relatively uncontroversial term. Some linguists define it as consisting of the processes of language determination, stabilization and codification. There is considerable confusion in the English -speaking world and among linguists about what SE is. However, it is not a language, it is less than a language. It’s only one variety of English among many. It is may be the most important variety of English, used in writing, printing , education system. It is the variety spoken by those who are often referred to as “educated people” and it’s the variety taught to non- native learners. Most native speakers of English in the world are native speakers of some non-standard variety of the language. There is one thing about SE on which most linguists agree and that is that SE has nothing to do with pronunciation. In Britain there is widely described accent known as Received Pronunciation (RP). RP is not associated with any geographical area. If SE is a dialect, RP where *received* is to be meant in its 19<sup>th</sup> century sense of “accepted in the best society”, is the accent most generally associated with it . Other names by which this accent is commonly known include Oxbridge English, BBC English, and Queen’s English. It is possible to speak perfectly SE with an accent other than RP. On the other hand, dialects other than SE are never spoken with an RP accent, and it would sound strange and quite unnatural to hear a conversation between, say, two Welshmen, calling each other *bach!* or *del!* , uttered in an Oxbridge accent.

SE is the result of a long process of changes, influenced by social, political, cultural and economic factors that started in Middle English period. Recent studies have shown that the geographical area that more than any other

contributed to the formation of SE is that of the so-called "East -Midlands Triangle", that included Cambridge, Oxford and London.

At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century London had approximately 250000 inhabitants, representing about a 10<sup>th</sup> of the whole population of England and Wales. At those times a habit was established to send the children of the upper classes to the so-called Public Schools . The new standard of speech began to be associated with the educated classes and became fluid as all natural languages are expected to be.

The Seven Public Schools, the first was founded in Westminster, the others are Charterhouse, Eton, Harrow, Rugby, Shrewsbury, Winchester, became the symbol of a whole class of people and values. This class had many distinguishing features and language was one of the most important among them. If a written standard had a long and settled history, it was pronunciation that, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wasn't rigidly established. The first scholar who recognized the change that had occurred from geoelect to sociolect of SE , was Henry Sweet. He wrote: "*Standard English is now a Class dialect more than a local dialect: it is the language of the educated all over Great Britain . The best speakers of Standard English are those whose pronunciation , and language generally, least betray their locality...*"(H. Smith, "*The Sounds of English, 1908*").

Nowadays, probably no more than 3-5% of the population of England has a totally regionless accent, and only 12-15% on the population are native speakers of SE. Those who are still thought to speak an "inferior" sociolect or a geoelect, are on the whole closer to SE and RP than their predecessors thanks to the increasing number of them, they are being exposed to, mainly through better education, the media and mobility.

So, if SE is not a language or an accent , then what it actually is? Most British linguists accept that it is a dialect which does not have an associated accent. It is simply one sub-variety of English. Sub-varieties of languages are usually referred to as dialects. Languages are often described as consisting of dialects. As a named dialect , like Yorkshire or Cockney, we should spell the name of Standard English with capital letters.

## 2. Cockney

By *Cockney* is currently meant the variety of English originally used in the East End of London. According to the most traditional definition , a true *Cockney* is anyone born within the sound of the bells of St. Mary-le-Bow church, Cheapside. Etymologically the word Cockney means "cock's egg", coming from *cokene* ,the old genitive of cock (OE *cocc*, *kok*) plus *ey* (OE *eg*; ME *ey*). This was a mediaeval term referring to a small, misshapen egg, supposedly laid by a cock. Cockney speakers have a distinctive accent and dialect and frequently use a rhyming slang.

By the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, countrymen began to apply it to people born and

brought up in cities and therefore thought to be weaker. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century it was referred only to Londoners, as an expression of disparagement and disdain. The term underwent a further shift, being related not only to people but also the language they spoke.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Cockney dialect made its first important appearance in literature, mainly through characters in Charles Dickens's successful novels, Sam Weller in *"The Pickwick Papers"* (1837), being the most illustrious. One of the features portrayed by Dickens through his characters is the supposedly Cockney habit of exchanging of v and w:

*"Vell, that's wery true, Sammy, but wot are you a doin'on here? Your gov'nor can't do no good here. They won't pass the werdick, they won't pass it, Sammy..."* (Chapter 43).

Already in 1938 William Matthews wrote: "The Cockney dialect at the present time is extremely varied, for many reasons. The London area is too large and too mixed for any uniform system of pronunciation to exist, and such social as education have produced many modifications of even the characteristic sounds." (1972) Nowadays degrees of Cockneyhood are perceptible all around the South-East of England. One of the most striking peculiarities of Cockney has always been its *Rhyming Slang*. Rhyming Slang is a kind of slang in which a word is replaced by another word or phrase that rhymes with it. It generally consists of a binary expression that rhymes with a single everyday word. The slang phrase co-exists with the standard word and it is up to the speaker to decide which to use. The target word is more often a monosyllable, though sometimes it may be a disyllable. Polysyllables are definitely rare. Some expressions have become so popular that they are sometimes used even in SE, though colloquially.

1. Bees and honey : money. E.g. "I've run out of bees and honey."
2. Cain and Abel : table. E.g. "I was sitting at the Cain and Abel."
3. Cat and mouse : house
4. China plate: mate. E.g. "Me and my China"
5. Dog and bone: phone
6. Donald Duck: luck
7. Loaf of bread : head. E.g. "Use your loaf!"
8. You and me : tea
9. Uncle Willy: silly
10. Jack Malone: alone .E.g. "All on his Jack."

Naturally, the examples are many and the list can be continued. Sometimes there may be two or more ways to indicate the same thing, or there may be one expression indicating more ideas.

Cockney slang has always been influenced by other languages (Irish, Yiddish, Germanic, Roman). Sometimes the influence has come from temporary London emigrants: during the British Empire quite a few people spent years

abroad, especially in Asia and Africa, thus acquiring scraps of the local tongues that they brought back to the East End when they came back (from Arabic: *ackers*: "money"; *bint*: "a girl"; from Hindi: *dekk*: "a look"; *doollally*: "mad", etc).

Some characteristics of cockney are:

initial h is dropped, so house becomes /aus/ (or even /a:s/).

/th/ and /dh/ become /f/ and /v/ respectively: think > /fɪŋk/, brother > /brʊvʔ/.

t between vowels becomes a glottal stop: water > /wɔʔi/.

diphthongs change, sometimes dramatically: time > /toim/, brave > /braiv/, etc.

Some diphthong alternations are:

/i/ → [əi~ei]: [bəi] "beet"

/eɪ/ → [æɪ~aɪ]: [bæɪ] "bait"

/ɔɪ/ → [ɔɪ~oɪ]: [tʃoɪs] "choice"

/u/ → [əʊ] or a monophthongal [ʊ], perhaps with little lip rounding, "boot"

/aʊ/ may be [æə] or a monophthongal [æ~a] - [tæən] "town"

Other vowel differences:

/æ/ may be [ɛ] or [ɛɪ], with the latter occurring before voiced consonants, particularly before /d/ - [bɛk] "back", [bɛɪd] "bad".

/ɛ/ may be [eə], [eɪ], or [ɛɪ] before certain voiced consonants, particularly before /d/: [beɪd] "bed"

/ɒ/ may be a somewhat less open [ɔ]: [kɔt] "cot".

/ɔ/ → [o] or a closing diphthong of the type [oʊ~ɔɔ] when in non-final position, with the latter variants being more common in broad Cockney: [soʊs] "sauce"- "source", [loʊd] "lord", [woʊʔə] "water". Th- fronting and T-glottalization can now be found in every county of England.

Other characteristics of Cockney slang are : abbreviations, (an abbreviation (from Latin *brevis*, meaning *short*) is a shortened form of a word or phrase. Usually, but not always, it consists of a letter or group of letters taken from the word or phrase), sometimes with the addition of -o (e.g. aggravation- aggro), euphemisms (Euphemism is a substitution for an expression that might offend or suggest something unpleasant to the receiver, using instead an agreeable or less offensive expression, or to make it less troublesome for the speaker. (e.g. God blind me - Cor blimey); *run-together phrases or sentences* (run-together sentences, or run-on sentences, are examples of sentences that should be divided up but have been written as if they are one sentence. (e.g. What cheer!- watcher!))

The use of *me* instead of *my* (for example: "At's me book". *Ain't* is used instead of *isn't*, *am not*, *are not*, *has not*, and *have not*) and the use of double negatives, (for example "I didn't see nothing") are grammatical features of Cockney.

George Bernard Shaw best epitomized The Cockney character in his play *Pygmalion*. In the preface to the play Shaw wrote: "The English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it. [ ... ] it is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman despise him."

Cockney speech has long been looked down upon as inferior by many. They thought it was unworthy of being the speech of any person in the capital city of the Empire. Nevertheless,

Cockney accent has been more accepted as an alternative form of the English language rather than an 'inferior' one. In the 1950s the only accent to be heard on the BBC was RP, whereas nowadays many different accents, including Cockney, can be heard on the BBC. Scientific surveys show that although speaking with a Cockney accent is not considered as bad as in the past, old attitudes towards RP still prevail.

### Ստանդարտ բրիտանական անգլերենը և քոքսիս՝ բնիկ լոնդոնցու անգլերենը: Քոքսիի որոշ առանձնահատկությունները:

Հոգվածը բաղկացած է երկու մասից, առաջին մասում ներկայացված է ստանդարտ անգլերենը, որը նաև կոչվում է BBC-ի լեզու կամ Թագուհու անգլերեն: Դա այն անգլերենն է, որի քերականությունը, բառապաշարը, ձևաբանությունը և շարահյուսությունը լայնորեն ընդունված է և հասկանալի է հասարակության բոլոր շերտերին: Ստանդարտ լեզու համարվում է լեզվի այն տարբերակը, որը ենթարկվել է ստանդարտիզացիայի: Ստանդարտ անգլերենի սահմանումը որոշ լեզվաբանների շրջանակներում տարաձայնությունների և անհամաձայնությունների տեղիք է տալիս: Շատ հաճախ այն ներկայացվում է որպես լեզվի ամենակարևոր տարբերակ, որը գործածվում է գրելիս, տպագրելիս, կրթական համակարգում, որով խոսում են կրթված մարդիկ, և որը ուսուցանվում է այլազգի ուսումնասիրողներին: Հայտնի լեզվաբան շենրի Սուլիթը ստանդարտ անգլերենը ներկայացնում է որպես հասարակության բարձր խավի կողմից գործածվող լեզվի տարբերակ:

Հոգվածի երկրորդ մասը վերաբերվում է բնիկ լոնդոնցու լեզվին, որը սկզբնապես գործածվել է Լոնդոնի Բսթ Էնդում: Տրված է տերմինի ծագումաբանությունը՝ հին անգլերենից բառացի թարգմանելիս քոքսի նշանակում է <<աքաղաղի ձու>>՝ թույլ, փոքրիկ, թերհաս ձու:

16-րդ դարում քոքսի ասելով գյուղաբնակները նկատի ունեին քաղաքաբնակներին, որոնց համարում էին թույլ և նվազ: 17-րդ դարից սկսած տերմինը սկսեց վերագրվել նաև լոնդոնցիների լեզվին: Քոքսիի ամենակարևոր առանձնահատկությունը հանգավորված պլենքն է, այսինքն բառը փոխարինվում է մի այնպիսի բառով, որի հանգը համընկնում է սովալ բառին: Այս երևույթը ավելի պատկերավոր ներկայացված է օրինակներում, որոնցից շատերը հաճախ գործածվում են լոսյեիսկ ստանդարտ անգլերենում: Քոքսիի բնորոշ գծերից են նաև բառասկզբի չտաքի սդումը, երկնիչյունների և ձայնավորների փոփոխությունները, հապավումների, մեղմասացությունների, կրկնակի ժխտականի գործածումը և այլն: Քոքսիի լեզուն հաճախ համարվել է ստորակարգ և անարժան՝ բրիտանական կայսրության մայրաքաղաքում խոսվելու համար: 1950-ական թթ. BBC-ով լսվում էր միայն ստանդարտ անգլերենը, մինչդեռ այժմ լայնորեն հեռարձակվում են լեզվի բազմաթիվ տարբերակներ՝ ներառյալ քոքսին: